April's Lady



Guy Chantepleure

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By

Guy Chantepleure

[Jean (Violet) Dussaq]



Translated by

Mary J. Safford

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Part First

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PART FIRST

I

THE highway, already too white, was growing more and more dusty under the March sun. Michel Trémor plunged into the wood, following the path which descends toward the cross-roads of Jouvelles.

The trees, adorned with a pallid verdure, ready to be blasted by the first frost, stood forth against the sky in a light tracery. Among the grass, starred with anemones "more richly clad than Solomon in all his glory," lay the brown veil of the last year's leaves. Yet vague murmurs of an awakening rose from the earth; mysterious wings were cleaving the air or quivering in the thickets; spring odours were exhaling. From this little universe touched by destruction, where already life was thrilling; from these mingled sounds — chirping around half-finished nests, voices of springs and brooks, snapping of a dry branch suddenly broken — emanated a powerful charm. It was the melancholy of things which are passing, mingled with the triumphant joy of their eternal renewal. Michel Trémor felt this charm very keenly without defining it.

On the first fine day he had escaped from the apartment in the Rue Beaujon, which he occupied for three or four months every year while mingling, somewhat against his will, in the life of Paris, and settled with

delight at Rivailler. He was accustomed to seek refuge after the winter within the walls of his ancient tower of Saint-Sylvère, which possessed in his eyes the twofold advantage of being tolerably near Castelflore, the summer residence of his brother-in-law, yet not sufficiently close for him to fear often the social invasions with which his sister laughingly threatened him.

Rivailler is a pretty spot! The population at the utmost is two thousand; there are neat houses and luxuriant gardens grouped around a church as dainty as a toy; woods, meadows, streams, springs and, here and there, in the environs, without counting Castelflore and Précroix, the finest estates in the neighbourhood, elegant villas, coquettish little châteaux standing on the shores of the water, or perched on the top of some easily-accessible hill.

Michel Trémor, who had explored a number of countries and intended to go to Norway early in May with the expectation of visiting several other lands, liked to rest eyes a trifle wearied by foreign views upon this peaceful horizon, where the Marne glittered in the sun like a huge pool of liquid silver.

The cross-roads of Jouvelles — a natural glade where, in a niche supported against the trunk of a beech, smiled a saint in an embroidered robe, his brow crowned with stars — was one of his favourite retreats.

Michel threw his dark cloak on the moss and stretched himself at full length with a sigh of pleasure. Looking for a moment at the sky which, covered with clouds, gleamed grey through the interlaced boughs, he opened the book he had brought, but it was to take from among

the pages several sheets of blue paper on which ran the elegant writing of a woman:

"*My dear little brother:*

"It is not to give you pleasure, but to scold you that I am writing. I said to my husband this morning: 'The mischief is certainly increasing! It may be all very well for Béthune, who is building something or other at Précroix, to bury himself at Rivailler the first of March. But I don't believe the dove-cote of Saint-Sylvère is capable of being adorned.' So, if I don't look after you, brother mine, you'll turn monk some day. That would be a pity.

"Were you really bored in Paris? You ought to come to us at Cannes. The season has been delightful. May Béthune will tell you about our carnival follies. It isn't three weeks since she left us with the children, recalled to Paris, where she must be still, by the illness of one of her old Philadelphia friends, Miss Stevens, who also spent the winter here in Cannes — a very tiresome person! but — where was I? Oh, I was only telling you that I wanted to see you here. Robert would be delighted to have a visit from you. The southern climate has cured his throat so well, that he eagerly seeks every occasion to exercise it in political discussions and you know I am no match for him; your nephew swears only by Saint Trémor the hermit, and Nysette's eyes dance with joy whenever your name is mentioned. As for me, I am dying to kiss you. It's six months since I have done so. And you and I are such good correspondents that, before your last letter,

it was three that we had communicated only in telegraphic style. So, you understand that I have a thousand things to tell you. My head is full of plans. Don't laugh, sir. I am thirty-two, fourteen months your senior, and I feel my terrible responsibilities! This wandering Jew or solitary life isn't fit for you. I want to marry you off, dear Michel; I have even found you a wife.

"If only I were near you, seated in some old worm-eaten chair in the tower of Saint-Sylvère, leaning on an ancient table laden with parchments! It would be such fun to answer your questions: 'How old is she? Is she pretty?' She is twenty-two, brother mine, and she is pretty. Besides, you know her. You met her six years ago, I think, at a dinner in my house. Chaperoned by a respectable governess who adored her and called her charmingly Zanne, she was spending a few months in Paris to fulfil her grandmother's wish and become more familiar with the language spoken there, the one the grammarians do not teach. You had arrived from some barbarous country and were preparing to set out again for I don't know what other one. I had invited half a dozen people, among them your friend Albert Daran, who gave us during the evening a sort of lecture about archæology, excavations, Salammbô and so many tiresome things that the poor child fell asleep, to the great scandal of the respectable governess.

"Do you remember? But I will take pity on your curiosity. It is Mrs. Jackson's daughter, our little cousin from America, the orphan girl to whom our

Aunt Régine was grandmother. Poor Zanne is alone for the second time! Her only relative, an uncle who had adopted her, died last year. She came to Cannes in December with that old Miss Stevens from Philadelphia, the friend of May Béthune, whose reader she had become, less to increase her income than to feel that she was under some little protection. A praiseworthy thing, when one thinks that I am speaking of an American girl.

"She is a jewel, Michel! And so good, so affectionate! True, she isn't rich — you know that Aunt Régine left nothing, and the adopted father's property is more than modest — but what is that to you? You have never deigned to bestow a look at all the large dowries I have presented to you. In short, this darling has won me, and my enthusiasm would have much more to say, but I expect to finish this pleading while keeping you under my maternal eye. What a triumph, little brother, if my folly should marry your wisdom!

"Apropos of folly, guess whom I saw the other day at Monte Carlo, through which she was passing, a widow and a more upsetting woman than ever? The Franco-Russian alliance, my dear Michel, or, in other words, Comtesse Wronska. The count died suddenly of cerebral congestion, and as he left no will the beautiful Faustine will return to Paris as poor as in the days when you and she sighed together under the shade of Castelflore. True, for seven years she has had the pleasure of nursing Wronski's rheumatism!

"Of course I avoided speaking to this creature, whom I abhor, and I have these particulars from Madame

Vernier, who is infatuated with her. Between ourselves, I think that Wronski did not succeed in inspiring Faustine with an aversion for marriage — which is amazing! — that she has a great desire to catch another husband and is a little tired of the Nevsky Prospect, so she is coming to try her luck in the neighbourhood of the Bois de Boulogne. She will be able to throw the first bait at the opera next Friday. Good little Madame Vernier carried her obligingness so far as to lend her her box.

"But not content with chattering, here I am talking scandal.

"May we meet soon, dear brother. Think a little of my affection for the American girl. Though you by no means deserve it, I kiss you very lovingly.

"Your Colette."

Michel read attentively from beginning to end this long letter, which had been handed to him just as he was going out. His sister's projects brought a smile into his brown eyes. Marry him off, and to a stranger, an unknown relative, whose very name, an instant before, he would have been unable to remember! Another wager of charming, madcap Colette.

Aunt Régine's granddaughter. Really these words told very little.

The romantic marriage of Mademoiselle Régine Trémor to a skilful Philadelphia physician, Dr. Brook, who had come to Paris to attend a congress, had taken place about fifteen years before Michel's birth, and as Madame Brook's visits to France grew more and more infrequent as time passed, he had seen "Aunt

Régine" only once. Aunt Régine, a widow, dressed entirely in black, with a face already faded and wrinkled by tears, and hair still light, which curled slily under her crépe hat. They knew she was not well off — her husband's laboratory and clinic had swallowed so much money! — they guessed that she was weary of America and the Americans, who understood her no better than she did them. Yet, before returning to Philadelphia, where her only daughter had married, she had said: "It is over, I shall never come back." And she had not come back, nor had she written except at long intervals. She had lost her son-in-law and daughter during an epidemic; at last she herself died, very weary of life, leaving in the world only a child of fourteen, her granddaughter.

This child, whom her relatives in Europe almost ignored, was Miss Jackson, the little Zanne whom Madame Fauvel had welcomed kindly in Paris, and with whom, six years later, she was so bewitched at Cannes.

While reading Madame Fauvel's letter, Aunt Régine's nephew had dimly seen again the indistinct outline of a little fair-haired girl with whom he had not exchanged ten words, and who had really fallen asleep in the drawing-room one evening when, according to his custom at the time, Albert Daran was discussing archæology and he, Michel, absorbed in sorrowful thoughts, allowed himself to be lulled by his friend's voice, without seeking to distinguish the meaning of the words uttered.

Six years! It was six years ago! How slowly time had accomplished its remedial work; how many days —

though prompt in changing love to hatred — it had consumed before transforming hatred into indifference, before enveloping the past with forgetfulness!

Michel mechanically folded the blue sheets and slipped them into his pocketbook. Already the little cousin from America and the matrimonial visions of Madame Fauvel were lost in mists. The young man's brain was occupied solely by the only words in this long letter which had awakened an echo: "Guess whom I saw at Monte Carlo, through which she was passing, a widow and a more upsetting woman than ever . . ."

Orphaned in their early childhood and placed under the guardianship of Monsieur Louis Trémor, their father's brother, Colette and Michel had been educated almost entirely alone. Monsieur Louis Trémor loved his niece and nephew most tenderly, but a bachelor, and a little selfish like the best of elderly unmarried men, he had found it very simple to borrow from the abbey of Thélème the essential principle of its pedagogical system, "Do what you like." Michel and Colette knew scarcely any other rule. If Uncle Louis never had cause seriously to repent such extreme indulgence, it was because he had given proof of some perspicacity in trusting to the upright, generous nature of the children confided to his charge. Yet when he died, mourned by Colette, whom he had married when very young to a distinguished lawyer, and by Michel, who, master of his fortune and his time, seemed to employ neither badly, he had been permitted to perceive an amusing contrast in the practical effect of his theories.

Uncle Trémor's principles which, in Colette, had pro-

duced the accomplished type of the society woman, had made Michel a sort of highly-civilised savage.

People laughed at the young man's awkwardness, his absent-minded, indifferent airs, the airs of an "old scientist"; they wondered at his aptitude for the ancient Oriental languages, and no human being knew that in the breast of this tall, silent fellow beat a heart famished for love, that in the brain, crammed with erudition, of this library rat, thrilled the romantic imagination of a boarding-school girl of fifteen captivated by a fairy prince.

Michel's princess did not come from the ideal world of fairies. She had taken the same course of lessons on the piano as Colette, lived modestly with a widowed mother on the fifth floor of a Paris apartment house, and bore the very ordinary name of Faustine Morel.

Michel and Faustine were nearly the same age; they had met for the first time one Thursday on the terrace of the Luxembourg, during a game of hide and seek; since then the young lad's imagination bestowed on all the heroines of romance, fable, and even history, abundant tresses of pale golden hair, a fair complexion, dark eyes with tawny lights, and especially a crimson mouth around which sometimes hovered a strange, incomprehensible smile, that might be ironical or gay, coquettish or a trifle bitter. At that time, Faustine was the bosom friend of Colette, who devoted herself to her with marvellous and somewhat whimsical ardour.

If Mademoiselle Morel had yielded to the entreaties of Colette, who wished to drag her into her whirl of gaities, it would have been sufficient to induce Michel

to renounce his evenings of work more frequently. But with a precocious seriousness and a gentle dignity which impressed Uncle Trémor, the pretty girl denied herself the pleasures of a life of luxury to which her financial situation did not permit her to aspire.

Yet though Madame Morel and her daughter declined to attend balls and large dinner parties, their answer was very different when the invitation was to a family entertainment and, when Colette had married Monsieur Fauvel, Faustine was invited to Castelflore for several weeks every summer. Simple, stylish, assuming toward young men in general, and Michel in particular, a rather haughty reserve, talking little, but well, just enough to reveal the charm of an unusually cultivated mind, the young girl had won the admiration of Monsieur Trémor. She somewhat surprised Robert Fauvel, who was in no hurry to pass judgment, but who had already lost all hope of ever checking Colette's reckless enthusiasms. As for Michel, he yielded to the enchantment without trying to escape from it. He loved the little friend of his childhood with the longing to adore while admiring, to incarnate in a single being the most beautiful dreams; he loved her also with infinite respect and triumphant joy. And of these raptures, he constructed a great delicious mystery, which he kept jealously to himself.

Yet one summer evening, in the warm, intoxicating silence of the garden of Castelflore, he spoke; the eager, passionate confession burst from his lips. Then the statue appeared to become animate, and Michel could believe himself beloved by this beautiful young girl,

whose poverty had showed itself so proudly. By virtue of his favourite adage, Uncle Trémor made no objection to his nephew's matrimonial projects, but the engagement must be a long one, and by Monsieur Fauvel's advice, it was decided that there should be no formal announcement for a year, at which time Michel would have completed his period of military service. The young man resigned himself to the delay. All through the winter and the spring the postman brought him exquisite letters; on days when he had leave of absence Faustine's welcome was tender and agitated.

What happened afterward? How did Madame Morel and her daughter find themselves in a new circle, a cosmopolitan and somewhat flashy society where very great and very insignificant people mingled? By what combination of circumstances were they led to conceive ambitions hitherto unknown to them? This is what the Trémors could not fathom.

But gradually letters from Faustine grew less frequent and when Michel, at last released from his service, hastened to Paris, anxious and bewildered, all the prayers and entreaties of love remained futile. Mademoiselle Morel calmly said that she had reflected a great deal and reading the depths of her own heart better, she had perceived that there would be no possible happiness in a marriage between her and Michel.

A month later, Faustine Morel married Comte Stanislas Wronski, a Russian multi-millionaire.

Michel was one of those who "suffer and die without speaking." He made a secret of his despair as he had of his love. But he shut his lips, tore up the work he

had commenced and changed his mode of life. For more than a year he devoted himself to pleasure as he had done to study; then, disgusted, he made a great effort, tore himself away from Paris, set out for Cairo and remained absent six months.

The spell was broken, only the man whom Michel restored to himself and his family no longer bore much resemblance either to the timid youth who had worshipped Faustine as an idol, nor the enthusiastic student who expected everything from science and dreamed of devoting to it his intellectual life.

Always optimistic, Uncle Trémor died congratulating himself upon the metamorphosis, without asking himself whether, beneath the mask of the Parisian gentleman whose courteous attitude and intelligent indolence he now approved, there might not still lurk some traces of the young savage whose unsocial labor and extreme sentiments he had tacitly condemned. True, the mask rarely fell, and only in the solitude of the "Saint-Sylvère dove-cote."

Thus eight years had passed, cicatrising the wound. Michel had never again seen the woman who had been his fiancée, and the charming image had gradually vanished from his memory. Yet, after these eight years, reading at the cross-roads of Jouvelles the name which Colette, too versatile herself to believe in eternal sorrows, had traced with a light hand, the young man started. Like Michel, like so many others, Faustine had expected from life more than life had been able to bestow; her talents, her little ambitious calculations had

been futile! Stanislas Wronski was one of those men who are afraid, by making a will, to remind death of their age.

Poor creature, to degrade herself for nothing!

II

DAY was advancing. A coppery light in the sky was bordered with large clouds of strange forms, which grew denser and insensibly descended nearer to the earth. Michel Trémor did not yet think of opening the book he carried; he had been repeating to himself the story of his youth, enjoying the memory of his ideas, his feelings in those days, smiling — not very cheerily — at their fresh ingenuousness.

A drop of rain fell on his hand, without his noticing it.

"Poor woman!" he repeated.

Curiosity fevered his brain. "Did she love me?" he said to himself, repeating the old question. "Now that in her turn she knows the bitterness of hopes deceived, now that she has endured to no purpose the shame of a venal marriage, now that a fatality snatches from her the wealth for which she did not fear to bind her youth and beauty to an old man's infirmities, now, will she think of me? Will she think that, after all, she might perhaps have been happier with the poor lover whom she tortured? Does she think that the rapture of felicity which she might have bestowed in exchange for an entire life, a fervent love, an absolute devotion, would have been equal to appearing at the court of Russia, and scattering gold without reckoning it? Does she regret what is no more? Does she cry out: 'Oh, if all this were only a terrible delusion, if

suddenly, I could lay my weary head upon his breast, feel his lips upon my burning eyes, and thus forget everything?' "

The clouds and the wood were illuminated, then a peal of thunder shook the earth.

Recalled to reality, Trémor rose and, wrapping himself in his cape, hurried toward the highway by the most direct road, but the rain increased and Saint-Sylvère was still five or six kilometres distant. Michel hesitated; in a few minutes he could reach another shelter, the little chapel which the inhabitants of Rivailler pointed out to strangers as one of the curiosities of the neighbourhood, under the name of the "Green Sepulchre."

A furious gust of wind hastened the young man's decision; he turned back and entered the forest to gain the Green Sepulchre more promptly.

This edifice, whose Gothic character was somewhat doubtful, so far as chronological authenticity is concerned, sheltered in the midst of the woods the tomb of an unknown knight. For nearly half a century it was abandoned to the ivy, which each year clasped the walls a little more firmly, marring the pointed arches of the windows, covering or oddly muffling the fantastic grimaces of the gargoyles. Michel loved this melancholy place. Several times he had sketched, with a delicate pencil, the exterior details of the monument or mausoleum in the middle of the chapel, the iron-covered form of the mysterious knight, his somewhat emaciated manly features, his closed eyes, his fine beard framed by the raised helmet, his hand clasped in a somewhat artificial pose upon the cross-shaped sword, and — carved

upon the stone pedestal of the tomb-couch, near the shield adorned with fluers-de-lis — the big greyhound, like some strange heraldic animal, which seemed to guard his sleep.

But this time the young man did not feel at all charmed by the prospect of a meditation in the funereal retreat. Already wet, he wondered wearily at what time he could return to Saint-Sylvère.

The whole forest was quivering under the swifter, denser fall of the raindrops. A veil of melancholy seemed to have been thrown everywhere — upon the light leafage of the trees, which appeared to be shivering; on the streams, on the little flowers that hung their fragile heads and lost the lustre of their whiteness.

An exclamation of annoyance addressed to the elements escaped Michel's lips; perhaps, too, in the depths of his soul, he reproached himself for having welcomed the unhealthful memories of the past.

He no longer loved Faustine, and every bond between her and himself was broken, but he would have liked to have heard of her again or seen her for the last time; he would fain have read in her eyes, once so beloved, a shade of remorse, to have seen in them the glitter of a tear. To believe himself a little regretted, a little mourned by her for whom he had wept and mourned so much, would have brought strange sweetness to his heart — not a feeling of revenge, but a serenity of pardon.

The rain was still falling, driven by a furious wind which bowed the slender trees and flung them against one another, breaking with a shock the branches that were too dry to bend.

At last Michel reached the Green Sepulchre. As his tall figure, draped in the dark cloak, towered upon the threshold of the doorway, a cry of terror echoed from within the chapel. In the dusk which gained a bluish tint from the last fading daylight sifted through the only window time had respected, a young lad of about fifteen appeared, singularly modern in this Gothic environment, with his serge blouse, knickerbockers, and yellow leggings buttoned to the knee.

"Oh, sir, I took you for the knight or one of his relatives . . . your beard is exactly the same," said the child with an accent which, though very slight, was sufficiently distinct to permit a trained ear to distinguish in it a pleasant reminder of the language of Shakespeare.

Then, with a deep sigh, he added drolly:

"Well, it's a relief to see a living being! I am glad."

Suddenly, as the stranger came a little nearer to the door, Michel perceived that he was confronting a tall girl or a very young lady in a bicycle costume. The machine was there, disrespectfully leaning against the stone couch, the tires brushing the fleurs-de-lis on the shield.

"I rather doubt whether the knight's relatives come to visit him after or before midnight, and I confess that I was ignorant of the resemblance between my beard and his," replied Michel, who had recovered from his surprise, and was amused by the self-possession of the young girl who, terrified at finding herself alone with a statue, instantly felt at her ease with a being in flesh and blood.

"On the other hand," he went on, "I know that many highway robbers would appear very presentable to-day in comparison with myself, and I ought to be grateful to you for having feared only a phantom when you saw me in my present guise."

"Oh! even a robber would have been welcome in the state of mind in which I was," replied the young girl, putting into her oh! all the unconscious drollery of her foreign accent.

"So you would not have hesitated between a pick-pocket and a ghost?"

"Not an instant."

"Well," answered Trémor, laughing, "I believe I am neither one nor the other, and if I can be useful to you in any way I shall be delighted. I suppose some misunderstanding has separated you from the companions of your ride and you are lost in the woods like Hop o' my Thumb?"

Michel Trémor usually affected a rather cold reserve toward women. But in the presence of this child who might need his protection, and whom he met outside of social conventionalities, he had spoken very naturally, with somewhat familiar simplicity.

The young girl was apparently offended by this lack of formality. Perhaps, too, now that she was reassured concerning the appearance of a ghost, she felt, after the first impression of relief, that she must show some caution in the presence of the terrestrial being whom her childish terror had so joyously welcomed. Her little head was thrown back, her delicate nostrils

contracted, the whole saucy face expressed supreme disdain.

"No misunderstanding has separated me from my companions, sir, for I was alone and as I never go without a road-map, I had no cause to fear the fate of Hop o' my Thumb. But I had just been to see some poor people and attracted by the pretty nooks in the woods, I was loitering — like Little Red Riding Hood, I believe — when the rain began to fall. That is what forced me to take refuge in this ruin, where I shall wait for the end of the shower — very patiently."

"On condition that the ghosts don't appear," Michel was about to answer, smiling at the tone of offence.

But he reflected that the young stranger had doubtless reached the age for the first long dresses, the period when, full of their new dignity, young girls live in the constant fear of being still treated like children.

He bowed silently, went to the entrance and, having removed his cloak, heavy with dampness, began to look out of doors.

"Is it still raining?" asked the young girl, a little softened.

"Not so much."

There was silence for several minutes then, seeing that Michel showed the most peaceful intentions, the stranger thawed entirely and came to lean against the doorway opposite to him.

"I can't offer you my cloak, for the rain has turned it into a sponge, and I am very much afraid that you will take cold," remarked the young man quietly.

She shook her head:

"I don't think so, sir; at any rate, I prefer the cold to darkness,— which I hate."

In fact, the interior of the chapel was now almost dark, and the knight's tomb, on which the last rays of light fell more directly, glimmered vaguely without definite outlines in the shadow.

Michel smiled. The bicyclist added:

"This chapel, so full of mystery, terrifies me. When I saw the bell turrets appear, I did not expect to enter a tomb. But I don't know this region. I have only been here since Saturday — that is, scarcely five days. What was the name of the knight who is buried here, when he was alive? Hasn't he the reputation of leaving his funeral bed sometimes, now that he is dead?"

"He has, not wishing to fail in this duty of every honest legendary dead man; but calm yourself, the midnight air, I repeat, is the only one which spectres can breathe. As for the knight's name, I regret that I cannot tell you; let us see."

Michel struck a match and, approaching the tomb, threw its light upon this sentence deeply graven in the stone: "Allys was the lady of his heart." It was followed by another: "Is there a sweeter name?"

"It is said," the young man went on, blowing out the match, "that, betrayed by some fair chatelaine who had promised him her faith, the poor knight set out for Palestine. Mortally wounded in battle, and in despair that he could never again see her whom he still loved, he was cared for by pilgrims who vowed to him that they would carry his body back to France, but in the anguish

of the death agony, the knight had forgotten his own name, and most of the circumstances of his former life. He could tell the charitable pilgrims only the story of his love and the name of its unworthy object. This was carved upon the crusader's tomb, with the words which he had doubtless uttered to excuse himself for no longer knowing what he himself was called: 'Is there a sweeter name?' This is the primitive tradition, then popular imagination furnished a variation, evidently suggested by these somewhat obscure words: the knight, by forgetting that the name of Mary exceeds in sweetness every human word, had committed a blasphemy. Condemned to wander in the wood every midnight, he will know supreme repose only on the day when, by some miracle, the name of a mortal written on the chapel wall will seem sweeter to his ear than that of Allys, and will make his heart beat again. If we were not enveloped in darkness, you could see how many charitable souls have attempted to soothe this desolate shade, but they are, in general, the souls of tourists. For a popular saying adds that the ghost, captivated and very jealous of the lady of his salvation, would not permit her to belong to another, but would again become a man to wed her himself — and the girls in this neighbourhood are a little afraid of this husband from beyond the grave."

The young girl laughed.

"O dear me! what a wild story — but a pretty one, isn't it?"

"Do you think so? Then perhaps I am wrong in telling you that this version is only a century old at

most. The mediæval spirit which conceived the fancy should have been born in the time of Hernani! The tomb, besides, was built before the chapel, which is a consolation, though it certainly does not date back to the crusades."

"Nonsense," replied the stranger obstinately; "those considerations do not attack the truth or at least the probability of the tale. Palestine, which can be replaced by another country, and the Saracens, for whom another people can be substituted, alone count in this legend; the knight might have lived in any age."

"Alas! you are right," Michel assented; "the story of the poor, brave man who is deceived, and dies of it, belongs to every time."

And he thought:

"Men do not always die of it; they are most frequently cured, but is that a blessing?"

Then he thought himself utterly ridiculous. As for his companion in captivity, she had scarcely heard the remark and did not divine the reflection; she was gravely sharpening a pencil with a huge pocket knife.

"I am going to write my name on the wall," she said earnestly; "I, too, want to make an effort for the repose of the poor knight."

Michel obligingly opened the precious box of matches, but the young girl had already lighted the lantern of her machine and knelt near the wall. So, leaving her to her childish task, he remained at the threshold of the chapel. His burning temples were relieved by the coolness of the atmosphere.

Besides, the weather was improving; the pattering of

the rain had ceased. The streams, swollen by the storm, were singing in the tranquil peace of the forest, and at times the trilling of a bird blended with their continuous murmur.

"It will be a fine evening," Michel predicted.

"So much the better," replied the bicyclist.

Then she rose.

"That is done," she added. "Who knows, perhaps I have thus bound myself to the unknown knight and have agreed to become his wife?"

Michel was on the point of asking what name she had written, but he was afraid of again rousing a sensitiveness which he knew to be somewhat suspicious.

"Oh," he replied, "I should be a little surprised if the knight, even to wed you, Mademoiselle, should care to encumber himself with the burden of life for the second time. I rather believe that if your name is sweeter than that of Allys, the noble paladin will have the ingratitude to forget her who bears it, in the delight of feeling himself at last forever dead."

"Who knows? Who knows? Perhaps he will wish to enjoy modern life! Perhaps the improvements of my bicycle may touch his heart. In his time, it could not have been pleasant every day."

While speaking the young girl had raised her machine and was somewhat nervously adjusting the lantern.

"Come, I think the shower is over," said Michel, taking a step outside of the chapel.

At first the stranger did not reply, then she began abruptly:

"I should like to know, sir, if by chance you and I are going in the same direction. Darkness, darkness in the woods makes an impression which I cannot control — in short, I am afraid."

Michel could not help smiling. Offering no apology for the resentment with which she had just now refused his offer of service, she condescended to ask it without too much haughtiness, now that he no longer offered.

"I should be unpardonable to permit you to cross the forest alone at this hour," he answered charitably, without pluming himself on his victory. "If you will allow me, I will take you to your home."

"I am going to the château of Précroix, to Madame Béthune's."

"To Madame Béthune's, capital! Précroix is even nearer than the tower of Saint-Sylvère, where I go afterward."

The young girl uttered a little cry of surprise.

"Do you live in the tower of Saint-Sylvère?"

"Certainly — as its owner. May I ask why you seem astonished?"

"Astonished, oh! not at all! But I admired from a distance, two days ago, the strange dwelling of which Claude Béthune had told me."

Michel took the bicycle and with a swift movement drew it across the threshold of the chapel, then he turned toward the little stranger.

"Oh!" she cried, "I was not mistaken, you *are* like the knight. I don't know whether it is the carriage of

your head or the cut of your beard — but it is striking!"

"I shall be charmed if the resemblance does not end by terrifying you," replied the young man laughing. "Shall we go?"

In twenty minutes they had gained the road. Michel pushed the machine which ran with difficulty over the soaked earth, furrowed by ruts; the stranger, with her hand on the other end of the handle-bar, walked at his side with a firm, regular step.

"I did not suppose that Madame Béthune would reach Rivailler until the first of next month," Trémor began for the sake of saying something.

"Précroix is to be given up to workmen and, as Madame Béthune expects to be absent all summer, she thought it useful to superintend the commencement of the intended repairs herself."

"She is so extraordinarily active! A regular American, isn't she? But it seems to me that the work at Précroix is depriving her a little of the pleasure of looking after her guests?"

This suggestion was answered by a shrug of the shoulders.

"Is it because you have met me alone that you make the remark, sir? Yet it is perfectly natural. Madame Béthune, as you have just said, is a true American. Since she could not leave the château to-day and carry herself the help urgently needed by one of her dependants — the mother of a peasant in the suburbs — she asked me to take her place in the task. The distance

was somewhat long, so I rode my bicycle, and that is the whole affair. If necessary, I would do it again to-morrow. It would be impossible for me ever to endure the humiliating dependence to which your young French women submit."

"Yes, but then —" Michel timidly objected.

A merry laugh interrupted him.

"Then one ought not to fear dead knights or darkness. I admit it."

Leaving the forest behind them, Michel and his companion now walked along the edge of the freshly ploughed fields which stretched along both sides of the road, and exhaled a good, healthful odour of wet earth: in the distance the lights of Rivailler dotted with fire the almost total darkness of the night. From time to time the footsteps of a peasant in sabots, or the creaking of a heavily loaded cart disturbed the silence of the country, then the peasant passed with a mechanical good evening, the jolting outline of the vehicle crossed gradually, as if in fragments, the luminous ray cast by the bicycle lantern, and all sounds died away until lost in the darkness of the night.

"If I had not met you," said the young girl frankly, "I should have died of fright; my corpse would have been found in the chapel to-morrow."

"And the story which pleased you would have been enlarged by a new incident. People would have said that, charmed by your name and unable to resign himself to losing you, the worthy knight had borne you to the other world. That is the way legends are always created."

"I love them when they are as interesting as this one. Has not the tower of Saint-Sylvère any?"

"No," replied Michel, somewhat curtly, without knowing why.

All conversation ceased for several minutes. Michel left the road and took the direct route which, passing around the village, led to the château of Précroix.

At last the young man tried to resume the commonplace dialogue.

"Is Monsieur Béthune at Rivailler too?"

"No," replied the stranger, who had not noticed the short reply just made by her improvised protector. "Monsieur Béthune isn't fond of the country."

"And the children?"

"Maude and Claire are here, but Claude remained in Paris with his father on account of his school."

"Claude is one of my great friends."

"One of mine too. We correspond. What a nice boy he is! So full of fun — and a tease! O such a tease!"

"Really! Would Claude venture to tease you, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh! *dear me!* Would he tease me!" cried the young girl.

"And you don't scold him?"

"I do scold him. But Claude is like me, he recognises no authority."

"What, you are an anarchist to that degree?"

"Certainly."

"You recognise no authority?"

"None," flatly declared the amazing little lady. Then she went on, laughing:

"To tell the truth, at this moment, by way of exception, I am forced to admit that of the Béthunes' governess."

A comical exclamation of horror escaped the lips of Michel.

"Miss Sarah, isn't it? An old American, thin as people rarely are, uglier than the ugliest, and romantic into the bargain! I saw her last year at Précroix. As I pitied her loneliness and talked with her sometimes, I was accused of paying her attention. Poor thing! It seems that she has an unbearable temper."

Another peal of laughter rippled upon the night air.

"It is impossible to describe the Béthune governess better," said the bicyclist approvingly. "Perhaps you slightly exaggerate her thinness, her ugliness, and her age, but as to being unbearable and difficult to live with . . . ah! that indeed she is, I'll answer for it! . . . Yet I must admit that we get along together tolerably well."

"I congratulate you upon it."

At this moment Michel stopped before the gate of the château of Précroix.

"Here we are at our goal, Mademoiselle," he said. "You will pardon me for not escorting you to the château, I should be ashamed to present myself there in this condition. Madame Béthune will excuse me for deferring my call until better weather. May I ask you kindly to give her the regards of Michel Trémor?"

This time again, the young man felt a curiosity to know what name had been written in the knight's chapel by this singular little creature from beyond the sea,

but there seemed to be no disposition to confide it to him, and Michel refrained from any question.

"Thank you very much, sir," said the young girl, cordially.

Then she pushed the gate, which was open, bowed a farewell and, trundling her bicycle, began to ascend the very short avenue which led to the flight of steps at the entrance of the château.

It was half past seven o'clock.

When Trémor reached the tower of Saint-Sylvère, he had already forgotten the little bicyclist of the Green Sepulchre. As at the cross-roads of Jouvelles, memories of a more distant past assailed him.

Poor, and detesting poverty, Faustine Morel had never had but one thought, one purpose: to escape from the humdrum life beneath which her pride suffered. In view of this object, she had avoided society, she had entrenched herself behind a haughty reserve, she had played, like a great actress, the sympathetic part of the young girl whose dowry was too small for her to think of marriage, too beautiful and too ardent not to love, too proud to let it be seen. Sometimes, carried away by her art, she had, like certain actresses, thrilled with genuine emotion, wept real tears, but the clever brain, always dominating this simulated sincerity of the nerves, had used them as a means. She had never loved Michel. With what artlessness the poor simpleton had entered the snare; what a triumph for Faustine Morel — up to the day she had found a better match.

"She was not worthy of my regrets," Michel repeated to himself, "no, she was not worthy of that great

homage, the grief of an honest, upright heart — and yet . . ."

Yet, at that very hour, after having spent months without giving Faustine a thought, Trémor could not banish the image of former days. It haunted him, exquisite, alluring, this vision which recalled treachery, suffering, exile, but also faith, youth, love!

He would fain have seen Comtesse Wronska again like the portrait of a dead woman whom he had loved, he would have desired to find in her the personification of a past that had been very dear. Now he knew the place, the day, and the hour when the sweet phantom could be evoked.

In the tower of Saint-Sylvère, Madame Fauvel's brother re-read the letter he had received, then wrote a few lines in reply, affectionately excusing himself for resisting the kind entreaty addressed to him, and gravely extolling the unappreciated charms of the "dove-cote." As he did not feel in a mood for jesting, he neglected to speak of the extravagant marriage Colette had planned; on the other hand, he did not fail to slip in an allusion to the meeting she had mentioned. Certain silences say too much. Madame Fauvel must not suspect the emotion her letter had caused.

The young man gazed long and vacantly at the envelope which he had just sealed, then he buried his face in his hands, and remained in this attitude, perhaps to conceal the burning blush which mounted to his forehead.

The morning of the next day but one — Friday — he took the ten o'clock train.

III

MICHEL passed suddenly from the peaceful sweetness of Rivailler and the quiet of the tower of Saint-Sylvère to the fever and noise of Paris. Upon entering the over-heated hall of the opera house which, at that instant was filled with the clear notes of a symphony, he felt as if he were in a disagreeable and oppressive dream.

The curtain had risen. The young man did not see — or saw so vaguely that no clear perception could be engraved upon his brain, the persons moving beyond the foot-lights — dull costumes, rustic figures, workmen or peasants in a rural stage setting.

As he slipped along the rows of chairs, a voice was declaiming a recitative: three or four hands clasped his in passing; familiar faces appeared in the uniform row; hasty greetings, "how are yous," which did not expect a reply, buzzed in his ears, and he made some of the absurd remarks about surrounding things which sometimes cross the mind at the very time an intense and often sorrowful thought occupies it.

As soon as he was seated, he searched the opera house for Madame Wronska. Madame Vernier's box? Was it this one or that? — Besides, Faustine was not there. The orchestra was pouring forth tempests of sound which half drowned the voices of the singers and, in these sonorous roars mingled something like other voices, strange, despairing — Faustine was not there. Then

suddenly, beneath the features of a woman dressed in white satin at whom he was mechanically looking, a movement of the eyelashes, an expression of the lips, suddenly revealed her to him with so vivid a remembrance that, for a second, he lost the idea of the present and his breath almost stopped. Oh, how entirely it was she, terribly, cruelly she herself! But it was only like a flash of lightning: almost instantly the stranger in white appeared.

In the orchestra the flutes were singing limpidly, soothingly, united with the sweetest voices.

By the side of Comtesse Wronska, the inevitable Madame Morel, always dignified and respectable in her eternal velvet livery, opened her expressionless eyes very wide. During the years the outlines of her face seemed to have grown even less marked, and Michel was reminded of the old-fashioned photos, pallid and imperfectly fixed, with which he used to amuse himself in his childhood while turning over his uncle Trémor's albums.

But the comtesse was taking up her opera glasses — he instantly lowered his. At the idea of being surprised in watching her, a feeling of shame overwhelmed him.

A high, very pure note made him start; he raised his head and tried to dispel his preoccupation by listening to Bruneau's *Messidor;* but the act was closing.

By degrees the chairs emptied. Michel found himself outside of the hall, making his way through the corridors at the side of one of his friends, a deputy of very positive convictions, who was explaining to him, figures in hand, beneficent theories concerning the monopolisation of alcohol. Then as he was hurrying back to his

seat, Adrien Dereux, one of the young men who had clasped his hand when he came in, stopped him. Leaning against the door, they began to talk, and Trémor listened absently to the clubman's chatter, as he had listened to the economical theses of the parliamentarian, up to the moment when Dereux asked if he had gone to pay his respects to Comtesse Wronska.

"No," replied Michel with great surprise.

"She is a splendid creature!" Dereux went on, without noticing his companion's astonishment, and in the tone he would have used in speaking of a fine racehorse. "I was introduced to her at Montebello, at the time of the coronation, you know. That idiot of a comte was still alive, and she was terribly virtuous. She is a very clever little woman, but old Stanislas left her nothing at all. True, while he was alive he gave her jewels enough for quite a pretty fortune . . ."

He continued to dilate upon the æsthetic perfections of Madame Wronska, then he added:

"Ah! you know the beautiful Faustine, I was not aware . . ."

"That is, I did know, seven or eight years ago, Mademoiselle Morel, who at that time was a very intimate friend of my sister," interrupted Michel, irritated.

"Yes! Well, my dear fellow, Comtesse Wronska remembers this distant past, for she enquired about you just now, and added that she expected to see you between the acts."

"Comtesse Wronska is very kind."

"Isn't she? And very beautiful . . . Ah, my dear fellow . . ."

He was starting off again with the same vehemence, but the crowd began to go back into the hall, and the two young men separated. Michel listened very attentively to the new act, trying to interest himself in the incoherent symbolism of the drama. But his thoughts were constantly drawn elsewhere and he could fix them only at the cost of wearisome effort. When the curtain fell upon the fine classical gesture of the sower who, alone in the darkness of the night, confides to the soil the hope of the next harvest, the young man breathed more freely.

This time he let the flood of spectators flow past and remained in his seat, watching without interest the boxes, most of them empty, with dim shadows moving in their depths.

Madame Morel had disappeared. Faustine was turning her back to the hall to talk with a lady sitting on the second platform, and a gentleman who stood leaning against the partition, with his gloves and opera hat in his hand. Michel felt someone touch his arm and saw Dereux, still smiling, with the contortion that deformed his cheek when his monocle was on the verge of falling.

"Trémor," said he, "Contesse Wronska has sent me for you."

And he added:

"My compliments."

"There is no reason for them," growled Trémor.

He tried to smile on leaving Dereux, but his heart was in a vise. The whole evening had appeared atrociously long and painful. He had come to seek a memory, the image of a beloved past, or perhaps he had

made this excuse for his unwholesome desire to see once more the only woman whom he had sincerely loved. But no matter! In Faustine, his eager eyes had not met this much desired reflection of former days; they had mournfully beheld the unfamiliar profile of this "magnificent creature" whose ideal beauty was sullied by the libertine admiration of the first fool. And, suffering from a sort of spiritual grief, Michel could yet watch himself suffer and laugh at himself . . . What had the eternal simpleton expected?

In the corridor he met Madame Morel, who was talking with a lady. He bowed without pausing.

When he entered the box, a trifle pale, but sufficiently master of himself to permit no outward sign to betray his emotion, Faustine was alone, surveying the audience through her opera glasses.

At the sound of the opening door she turned:

"At last!"

Trémor had bowed with a courteous, but very cold respect.

"Monsieur Dereux told me, Madame, that you did me the honor to send for me."

He intended to imply from the beginning, perhaps a little brutally, that his visit was not absolutely voluntary.

Comtesse Wronska pointed with her fan to a chair near her.

"Monsieur Dereux has reminded you of your duty," she retorted lightly. "I have many friends in Paris, and all who are here to-night have welcomed me."

"That is because they doubtless have more confidence in your memory and their own merit than I, Madame. I confess that I thought myself too completely forgotten to pay my respects to you. I thank you for having proved that I am mistaken."

This absolute correctness of deportment nevertheless permitted a certain shade of aggressiveness to appear, but if Trémor's heart was throbbing almost to suffocation, his voice did not tremble.

Faustine looked at the young man steadily.

"Sit down," she said in the same tone of cordial and winning courtesy.

He obeyed, and while a very slight smile hovered around his lips, he began to scan the hall.

"A fine room," he remarked, adopting the same manner.

"Superb!" carelessly assented the comtesse.

While mentioning the well-known persons whom he had seen in the opera house, Marcel Prévost in the orchestra, Madame Augusta Holmes in the amphitheatre, the Minister of the Interior in a box, and many others here and there, Michel gazed at the young widow.

Yes, she was changed, greatly changed; he was no longer surprised that he had not instantly recognised her. Was she more beautiful? He did not know. She was different. Her bust was magnificently developed, though the waist, closely clasped by a jewelled belt, remained very small and supple; the milky whiteness of the shoulders was scarcely distinguishable from that of the silver embroidered satin gown which framed them and fell without a fold, defining the outlines of a stat-

uesque figure; each feature of the face was striking; the slight curve of the lashes, perhaps pencilled with black, were outlined a trifle harshly upon the low brow, shaded by a mass of golden hair somewhat darker than before, perhaps artificially reddened. But the eyes especially, the eyes were no longer the same. . . .

Faustine, too, was doubtless seeking in the manly countenance of the promised husband of her youth the traces of the years, of life, of sorrows. There are hours when only decisive trivial words come to the lips, when we can say only too much or too little; there could be no half way between Michel Trémor and Faustine Morel, and both had tacitly comprehended it.

Meanwhile they discussed music, talked of *Messidor* and the various lyrical efforts of Bruneau, then they reached Wagner, the last season at Bayreuth. Sometimes the little bitter smile, a phantom of the past, hovered around Faustine's lips and the fleeting expression contained a whole mystery of irony, perhaps the irony of those who, by an involuntary division of their personalities, continually watch themselves playing the comedy of life, and pity themselves for taking so much trouble about so trifling a thing.

Suddenly they were silent. The conversation through whose polite, conventional words came a sort of aggression, the conversation in which each was afraid to let the other speak, stopped. They were silent, and the emptiness of their words was instantly filled in their ears by the buzz of the great hall, the noise of a crowd which is almost a silence, as the crowd itself is almost a solitude. It gave them the impression of a glacial cold.

Then, in a very low tone, suddenly casting aside the carelessness she had just affected, Faustine faltered:

"How long ago it is . . ." A sentence which said much or very little.

Michel wished to take it as saying very little.

"Very long," he repeated. "Have you never returned to France?"

She went on, still in a low voice:

"You know that — that I am a widow?"

"I learned it recently, yes," said Trémor, this time gravely, "and I pitied you."

The little bitter smile on the red lips deepened.

"And you," the young woman continued; "you have travelled, worked. I have read your articles in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Oh! you will succeed, I am sure — you can expect much!"

She seemed scarcely to be addressing Michel, and he contented himself with bowing without an answer.

"You were — shocked, were you not, just now, when I sent for you?" she asked abruptly.

"I was very much astonished, Madame."

Another silence followed these words, then in a still lower tone Faustine added:

"Yet I must tell you,— explain . . ."

Michel hastily raised his head, and looking at the young widow, said:

"Oh, I understand; let us not allude to the past."

The door opened, the dismal figure of Madame Morel appeared. Michel rose. As he was formally taking leave, Madame Wronska held out her hand to him, and while yielding to his clasp the warm delicate fingers, the

white blossom of flesh which had just been drawn from the perfumed glove, she murmured:

"I am at the Continental. I shall see you again, shall I not?"

But Michel's face did not brighten.

"I am afraid not, Madame. I shall return to Rivailler to-morrow, and shall probably remain there until my departure for Norway, where I shall spend the summer," he replied.

And, again bowing to Madame Morel and Faustine, he went out.

The act was beginning; the young man waited until the end, then he left the opera house.

Now all excitement was dead, leaving in its place a great moral lassitude, which resembled the sadness of a deception.

As Michel mechanically went up the Avenue de l'Opera, Monsieur Béthune, who was returning on foot from the Théâtre Français with Claude and Baron Pontmaury, stopped him a moment; then all four resumed their walk and while Pontmaury and the owner of Précroix plunged again into the financial discussion which this meeting had interrupted, Michel took Claude's arm.

Ah, this nice boy Claude, the glory of a scholastic group of tennis and football players, cyclist emeritus, future director of sports, was not an intellectual fellow. Yet he was soon going to finish his last year but one, and the shadow of the bachelor's degree was waxing on the horizon. Trémor, who had not seen his little comrade for some time, talked with him about the school and the new programmes.

But college, as soon as the day was over and even a little before its close, occupied Claude's mind very little except from the standpoint of tricks to be played on "profs" or ushers. Oh! then, what larks! There was one usher on whom they were going to play off one of those well-planned "April Fool" pranks which a man always remembers if he jogs along to be a hundred years old.

Michel listened indulgently to the details of the April Fool, which were more droll than malicious; then he heard the story of the last match of the Velo Club, and the dithyrambic description of an automobile. Farewell to the bachelor's degree and the programmes.

In the presence of this fresh, healthy, exuberant youth, intoxicated with strength, bustle, and fresh air, Trémor thought of his own, so serious, so prematurely mature. Claude was nearly sixteen and in his robust body lived a still childlike soul. Michel did not remember ever being sixteen. At the time of obtaining the first rank in the university, he had considered every hour given to sport an hour lost; a fine enthusiasm had intoxicated him; he wanted to learn, to fathom, to grasp everything. He devoured huge books, stuffed his brain with facts and ideas, and grieved because absolute truth did not come forth from them.

At the university, Michel, always obliging and wholly free from vanity, was beloved by his companions, and respected also, for if he was known to be capable of winning a prize in the general competition, several jokers had already discovered that he did not confine himself to being strong in his studies and that malicious jests

might not be well received. But he was very little understood. Between him and the young men among whom he daily sat, under the same instruction, occupied in the same studies, the relations were very superficial, very commonplace. Those of his fellow students who knew him best often reproached him with "taking everything seriously."

This had really been Michel's error; at least, he now thought it his duty to prove it. It was because he had taken his first love dream seriously that he had made it the sole romance of his youth; it was because he had taken seriously that common deception, a woman's treachery, that he had spoiled his life; it was because he took everything seriously that a word so easily wounded him to the heart, that a doubt so easily tortured his mind, and that every instant some discouragement overwhelmed him. Doubtless he had expected too much from truth, from science, from love, from life; the chimeras had been too beautiful, and he was not one of those whom inferior realities console.

Béthune had called a carriage; they were about to separate. Claude took leave of his companion who, perhaps, had seemed a little absent-minded during the past few minutes.

"I suppose you think me an idiot, eh?"

Michel smiled, and accompanying his reply with a friendly pat on the shoulder, said:

"You are perfectly right; go ahead!"

Yes, you are right, added Trémor mentally; bicycle, go boating, run races, make "April Fools" of your ushers, sketch on your books, read the *Velo* and the bul-

letin of the *Touring Club* and don't think too much, don't dream too much, don't love too much! At thirty, you will perhaps be a little ashamed when you look back, but age will not have changed you sufficiently for such an adventure to happen to you often; you will console yourself by admiring your muscles, and you will not complain of life, for it will have given you what you asked of it. And as with this you will be a good fellow, an honest man, as your father will have left you too much money for it ever to be necessary for you to enjoy a certain form of sport which we call, after the English, the *struggle for life*, I don't see, on the whole, for what the grumblers would have a right to reproach you.

Michel avoided going to the Continental the next day, but he did not return to Rivailler. He spent the greater portion of the morning with Maître Allinges, his notary, who was just negotiating in his name for the purchase of a house in the Quartier de l'Etoile, and wanted to talk with him about different matters, then Albert Daran took him by surprise, and carried him off to lunch in the Place de la Madeleine.

The fate of this friend of Michel was a very singular one.

When Monsieur Daran, his father, a distiller in the suburbs, had left France on account of bankruptcy, and gone with all his family to settle near Louisville, accepting the position generously offered by one of his old friends who had owned for several years a large distillery, Albert had given up without too much regret the studies which, up to that time, he had pursued, with no great success, in one of the universities in Paris.

But life in Louisville did not seem to him any more attractive. Occupied from morning till night, and making himself, after his best efforts, of no use in the firm where his father was employed, his sole amusement was to collect stamps which were furnished by his employer's letters, and to rove about the country every Sunday, to gather and classify in his herbal the interesting specimens of the flora of Kentucky. A happy occupation!

Thanks to his herbal and his knowledge of plants, Albert Daran had found one day, when possessed by the inspiration of genius, the formula for a new cordial, a delicious cordial which seemed perfumed with all the spicy odours of the country! Remembering his classical readings of Chateaubriand and Atala, he had christened it with the obscure name "Elixir des Muscogulges" and it had proved the salvation of himself and his family.

In fact, the Elixir des Muscogulges, skilfully launched by the lucky inventor's employer, made the tour of the globe. At first it was scarcely seen except in effigy, on the covers of known and unknown periodicals in the New and the Old World, then it was visible everywhere under its real form in the tinted bottle which emphasised its beautiful opaline color, and everywhere it triumphed. Like all good Americans, the young Frenchman had discovered his gold mine!

Rehabilitated before the laws of his country, Monsieur Daran had become, at the end of several years, the partner of his benevolent friend, the intelligent promoter of the elixir, and their exploitation of the banks of the Ohio, was numbered among the largest in that portion of the United States. As for Albert, he had abandoned

the struggle and, no longer troubling himself about the Muscogulges except to draw every year the fine income from the share he had retained in the Louisville business, returned to France. Nothing now prevented him from satisfying on a larger scale his persistent taste for collections and classifications. At the university Albert had collected match boxes; in Kentucky he had collected stamps and plants. His most recent mania made him visit all the antiquaries in France in pursuit of ecclesiastical objects, priests' vestments and altar ornaments. It followed many others, and doubtless would be followed by many more.

The relations between Trémor and Daran dated back to the distant period when one helped the other in troublesome translations and difficult problems. And already Michel felt touched by the friendship and perhaps also by the enthusiastic admiration his companion showed him. The accidents of life had brought them nearer to each other. They had met unexpectedly in Egypt, at the museum of Boulaq. Michel had found a singular sweetness in the fraternal affection very simply offered, an affection in which the old admiration still entered, then gratitude, for the young paleographist, with unfailing readiness, placed his knowledge of Oriental languages and archæological questions at the disposal of the ignorant traveller. Great perseverance, extraordinary desire to understand, absolute humility before the knowledge of others, permitted Daran to utilise and develop very ordinary talents. A jovial good sense filled the place of intelligence and he possessed, in default of a more thorough education, that innate tact which comes

from the heart and almost always preserves from churlish scorn the individuals endowed with it. Trémor loved him for his faithful soul, his sometimes brutal sincerity, his confiding goodness, his splendid loyalty as man and friend.

To know that there is in the world a devotion upon which we can absolutely rely, which we shall always find ready, is very comforting and infinitely sweet in all the hours of life, good and evil.

Michel at least thought so, and — a strange thing — the dunce of the university, the inventor of the Elixir des Muscogulges, the artless tourist of the museum of Boulaq, was the only human being whom he voluntarily allowed to suspect anything of his inner life, the sole person whom he sometimes permitted to read his soul, sealed to all the rest of the world.

IV

ON leaving the restaurant where they had lunched, the two young men went down the Rue Royale.

It was one of those beautiful days in Paris when it seems as if spring is mysteriously passing into the air. Here it comes in the form of a young girl in a light gown, and yonder, invisible, among the fragrant odours of gillyflowers sold on the sidewalks. Flowers, flowers, flowers! They are everywhere, in the arms of children, at the belts of women, in the ears of the horses; business men carry them in their hands; porters have their backs loaded with them; the cook keeps in a corner of her basket a bouquet of fresh jonquils, and the unkempt street boy holds a violet between his teeth.

In the Champs Elysées, children are running about under the trees with shouts of joy, in the midst of great clouds of golden dust, and on the benches old people are warming themselves with happy faces.

"The 30th of March already! How the days pass! We are in the midst of spring!"

Having made this original remark, Daran suddenly slipped his arm through Michel's, who had not answered.

"I would give all my collections and even this extraordinary monstrance of which I was just speaking, to see you happy, my dear Michel," said he.

Michel started.

"Happy!" he repeated, "but why should you suppose that I am not happy?"

Daran shrugged his shoulders.

"No; you are not happy," he replied. "Ah! it is unfortunate that some worthy robber will not some day do you the service of stealing a fiftieth of a thousand pounds of income."

"You are delightful!" exclaimed Trémor with an amused smile. "Do I spend my fortune foolishly?"

"Not at all, but if you were poor, you would not confine yourself to this negative wisdom; you would work; that is all."

"Do I lead the life of an idler?"

"No, certainly not; you work, you work — but when you have time. You travel, too, but you take no pleasure anywhere. I would almost prefer to see you provided with a little place as archivist in some provincial city."

Michel laughed.

"Ah! well, tell me, what great work do you accomplish yourself?"

"I am only a sluggard, I confess, but with me it is different. I have not a brain that starts off on every pretext for the land of the impossible, nor a heart whose favourite pastime is to tear itself into bits. In short, I am a very commonplace fellow, incapable of anything great, anything useful. I am the inventor of the Elixir des Muscogulges! As much as saying that I am not anybody. You are somebody, and if you ever become the inventor of anything, you will be able to sign your work. Would not your history of the thingumbob — what do you call that barbarous people?"

"The Hétheens."

"That's it. Well, are you working on your history of the Hétheens now that, to obtain the material, you have made a journey to Egypt, one to Greece, and two to Syria?"

"But I really intend to work upon it, my dear Mentor, and when I have returned from Norway —"

"I was expecting that. For you to begin anything, you must always return from somewhere. If you had no money, you would work, I tell you."

"Oh!" cried Michel, "my history of the Hétheens wouldn't flood me with bank notes."

"Perhaps so," replied Daran obstinately. "At any rate, it would cover the poor archivist with glory."

"Not even that," retorted the young man; "nobody reads books of that sort. Ah! you want to ruin me, Daran. My notary is coming to conclude a money matter. Behold me the owner of a house."

"Maître Allinges? I know him. A very honest fellow, but a dreamer like yourself. Come, would it trouble you very much to be ruined?"

"Very much!" said Trémor, pausing to relight his cigar from Daran's.

"Let us go on, then, to the second part of my programme," Daran continued. "It is more easily carried into execution. I want you to marry. Oh, I'm not thinking of it to-day for the first time. Hang these selfish bachelors!"

"I am going to say to you as I did just now. Why don't *you?*"

"Then I shall answer as I did just now; with me, it is different. I was born an old bachelor, in the same

way that I was born a collector. I have a lot of little fads to which I cling; I should bore my wife and, above all, my wife would bore me inexpressibly. But you. . . . ah! you! — You have no fads, but you are entirely lacking in the understanding of practical things; you go along with your nose in the air, at the risk of breaking your neck. What I desire for you is a sensible little brain that will do some thinking for you, and then a gentle little hand, which would cool your forehead when it burned as it does to-day. Oh, I need not touch it. I have told you that my wife would bore me; you would gain infinitely by being bored by yours. It would end in diverting your thoughts and keeping you from trying to fathom some problem that you will never solve. And you would worship your children. How the little chaps jumping around your legs and yelling in your ears from morning till night, would drive away your gloomy notions. I can see you now — you would take up again Montaigne, Fénelon, Rousseau; you would read all the modern books published on education, and Heaven knows how many they publish! This would amuse you for a time, and then you would rear your children simply by your paternal heart and brain, and without occupying yourself overmuch about pedagogues, you would make men of them, real men! That would be worth the history of the Hétheens, I assure you."

Michel had only half listened; his smile was a little sad, a little bored.

"You are very eloquent," he said. "I can already imagine the rare bird whom you destine for me, the

sweet and serious companion, the clever woman who is not pedantic, and is gay without being frivolous, etc. I have met that rare bird in all the novels I read when I was very young."

"I have met her in life, myself, and so have you. The wife of your friend Réault, there — I would like a wife for you like Madame Réault. Besides, she has a sister. Marry Mademoiselle Chazé."

"My dear Albert," said Michel more gravely, "I don't deny that there might be some truth in your lecture, though it appears to me open to discussion, but if you knew how little I think of marrying; if you knew the disagreeable impression the mere name you have just uttered produces upon me, you would give up the match. Ah! these bargains by private contract which are negotiated daily, these introductions, these paltry comedies which constitute marriage in our country! Ugh! Won't you come up a moment, since you have accompanied me here?"

They had turned the corner of the Rue Beaujon, and stopped in front of the house where Michel lived.

"With pleasure," replied Daran.

But this diversion did not long change the course of his ideas.

"I confess it," he soon went on. "If there is a person whom I rarely imagine in the distasteful character of the young man to be married, it really is you. It would be better, I think, if a young girl could be found who was sufficiently bold, and sufficiently in love, to pay court to you and ask you in marriage. Yes, then I know you are so kind, so much afraid of causing

anyone the slightest pain, that when she said to you: 'I love you. Will you marry me?' you would never have the courage to reply: 'No.' And you would be happy in spite of yourself."

"Certainly — for this young girl, sufficiently bold and sufficiently in love, would be thoroughly bewitching. If you had seen Colette, I should think she had given you your lesson," Trémor continued, opening the door of his smoking room to usher in the tormenting sermoniser. "She wrote the other day exactly what you are saying now. There, sit down."

"Madame Fauvel is a sensible woman."

"Poor Colette," sighed Michel humorously. "That compliment would seem new to her. Will you have cigars or cigarettes?"

"A cigar, if you please. And even if this compliment were new, if good sense were not habitual with Madame Colette, what if she had suddenly found it, by an inspiration of genius, in her affection for you? Mothers, sisters, or wives, women who love have such inspirations. Does your charming sister propose a fiancée for you?"

"Of course."

"Good!" cried Daran, lighting his cigar with an air of satisfaction. "Do I know her?"

This time Michel burst into a very sincere, ringing laugh, which transfigured his whole face. Standing leaning against the chimney-piece, his cigarette in his hand, he seemed at this moment singularly young.

"Yes, by Jove! you do know her! Only I don't know whether you remember her. It is Miss Jackson, a

distant cousin, my Aunt Régine's granddaughter. Miss Jackson came to Paris a few years ago to study French, and we dined with her, you and I, at my sister's. You were at that time absorbed by your archæological studies; you talked all the evening about excavations and ancient ruins, and it seems that your eloquence put the young lady to sleep."

Daran laughed heartily.

"I remember," he said. "A little Anne or Jeanne — a blonde whose lovely mouth did not say much, but whose very drooping eyes and very tip-tilted nose were confoundly talkative. Well, this child is extremely pretty. You once had an affair with a precocious jade —"

Without heeding Michel's gesture of impatience, Daran calmly continued:

"You once had an affair with a precocious jade, and that is what has disgusted you with marriage. Yet, as you are a fine fellow, I have never heard you infer that because one base woman deceived you, the earth might be peopled only with traitresses. Besides, haven't you a delightful sister, perhaps a madcap with a head filled with trifles, but a noble little woman, who would throw herself into the fire for her husband, her children, or you? To have you marry is very simple; it only requires that a charming young girl should love you."

"Very simple," murmured Michel. And he shrugged his shoulders.

"Very simple, certainly," repeated Daran, shrugging his also. "It is very nice to be modest, but don't let us exaggerate.— And then, you are gloomy, you dis-

trust yourself, you have had trouble, you have the air of a hero of romance. This is what kindles the imagination of a young girl."

Trémor had sat down with a feeling of depression. The conversation was becoming painful.

"It is your own imagination that kindles, and for the impossible, my poor friend," he cried. "No, I am not a hero, but simply a man who does not understand himself very well, and whom others do not understand at all. And it is so stupid to be misunderstood. I believe I was born with a sick heart; someone has undertaken to widen the wound. Now it is healed, but the suffering has terribly changed me. I am not vicious; the troubles of others grieve me; you are right there. Yet I am violent, jealous, brutal. And also hard to live with, embittered. A hero of romance sometimes has the right to kill, bue never to be in a bad temper. I am often in a bad temper."

Michel walked up and down the room twice, threw his cigarette into the chimney-piece, and sat down again.

At the end of a moment, Daran went on:

"One day you explained to me what a palimpsest is. This insignificant memory has remained with me; you always make me think of a palimpsest. What is seen of you is not what you originally were. It would be necessary to be able to read in you another text, another story hidden for a long time by the one you allow everyone to decipher."

"You well know the story that would be read," said Michel mournfully.

"Might there not be palimpsests written three times?

Michel, I wish a very skilful little paleographer would know how to awaken in you, as you are now, not the man whom Faustine Morel made you, but the child you were and whom I knew well; the worker, the enthusiast, the poet, the serious youth, too serious, too shy, perhaps, but so kind, so tender, so trusting; the charming human being whose heart would have opened wide, whose intellect would have blossomed superbly, if he could have had the sweet, genuine affection, the calm, industrious life for which he longed. Ah! I assure you, with a little trouble and much love, he could be found, my little friend of former days."

Michel shook his head.

"Another illusion," he said.

He went to a corner of the room, took from an ironwood shelf a curiously wrought bottle, poured some Madeira into a small glass, and offered it to Daran.

"That's right," said the other. "It's not my elixir — on the contrary."

Then, as if the pleasure of tasting the very old and fragrant wine had suddenly given him a clearer idea of the harmonious charm of the things which surrounded him, he glanced around the room where Michel had received him so many times.

The warm light which shone through stained glass, mysterious, hieratical, as if it emanated from the illuminations of a missal or a book of legends, awoke the faded richness of the old brocades and the tarnished gold of frames and plate, enveloped in an atmosphere of the past, sumptuous and quiet, furniture which belonged to an Italian style of the sixteenth century.

"It is pretty, very pretty here, my dear Michel! Stay, that is new, that embroidered chasuble which you have draped yonder, near those daggers. What marvellous work!" cried the collector, rising, his glass in his hand, to examine the gold flowers of the sacerdotal robe.

Then he rejoined Michel and, standing before him, said:

"Very pretty, your ivory castle. Not an error of style in the details of this furniture, these little treasures chosen by a connoisseur. And yet, if yonder, in the neck of that amphora, there was a fine branch of lilacs and, farther away, in that cup, some fresh roses, your charming museum would gain something more friendly, more animate. Put some flowers into your life, my dear Michel; it is necessary."

Daran having gone, Michel went back to Maître Allinges to sign some papers which were not ready in the morning, and the notary talked with him for a long time of an enterprise in which he himself had just invested some capital.

It was a joint-stock company furnished with a considerable capital, which intended to increase the importance of French colonies and promote emigration to them by cultivating on a vast scale, and with the aid of agents and French workmen, the agricultural productions or industrial wealth peculiar to the soil and climate.

"Come, Monsieur Trémor," the notary persisted, "let me secure you thirty shares. You will not regret it, and if you should at any time, I will take them my-

self; I have confidence. And then, this business is fine, is beneficent. It is not only a profitable business transaction, but a work of patriotism and humanity."

And Maître Allinges dilated copiously on this subject.

Advantageous or not, certain or risky as to the result, speculation had never attracted Michel. He loved money only for what it bestowed, and financial questions wearied him.

The fortune which Colette and he had received from their guardian's hands, and that which had come to them later at the death of Monsieur Louis Trémor, was found to be almost exclusively invested in stock of the Metropolitan Bank of Discount. Their father for several years, their uncle during a good quarter of a century, had been members of the board of directors of this important financial establishment and gradually, by the force of circumstances, all their funds became placed in it.

Colette's husband having the folly, or the wisdom — as one takes it — to like investments in houses and land, Monsieur and Madame Fauvel had quickly decided to realise on the share which had fallen to them, but Michel, attracted by the advantages of security and peace of mind of a very commonplace investment, the investment of a good father of a family, as Maître Allinges said, had prudently kept his. Only two or three times, since the death of his Uncle Louis, had he been persuaded by the enthusiastic notary, who never stopped proposing profitable things, to sell a certain quantity of stock. Very recently, one of these rare concessions had been for the purpose of the purchase of an unfurnished

house in the Rue des Belles-Feuilles, which had just been completed.

"You are insatiable, my dear friend," declared Trémor, when Maître Allinges had finished his account of the "Colonizer."

But he smiled. If the financial combination upon which the enterprise the notary had just summed up was based could only find him cold or indifferent, the essential idea could not fail to attract him from the moral and political point of view.

Besides, Trémor, especially to-day, was given to excusing generous extravagances. So he yielded once more, and asked Maître Allinges to subscribe in his name for thirty shares of the "Colonizer," then leaving the office, he went to Durand-Ruel's to see some drawings by Puvis de Chavannes, returned to the Rue Beaujon, glanced over the evening papers, wrote a letter of recommendation for a poor fellow, added some delicately disguised assistance, and toward seven o'clock, determined to ask that very evening the hospitality of Jacques Réault, one of his schoolmates, now attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, an intelligent, warm-hearted fellow, to whom he was bound by ties of friendship, and who had just married Thérèse Chazé, a friend of Colette. It was said to be a scarcely prudent love match, for Jacques had not much property, and the fortune of Thérèse was one of those dowries that make matchmakers smile.

In the cab that carried him to the Rue des Ternes, where the newly-wedded couple lived, Michel thought once more of yesterday evening, jeering at himself for

the artlessness of which he had always given proof, in his relations with Faustine. What illusions did he still retain the evening before concerning this strange woman, who had a head instead of a heart? Cold, impassive, absolute mistress of her moral and her physical being, Faustine knew how to feign the sincerity of regret as well as the sincerity of love.

"She is terribly virtuous," Adrien Dereux had said.

Involuntarily Michel thought that this virtue without integrity had indeed become terrible, like this soulless beauty. Poor skilful actress! Was she reduced to the piteous resignation of the heron of the fable?

Comte Wronski has died intestate; I have nothing, or almost nothing; true, I am still beautiful enough to be married without fortune, but disinterestedness is rare in the modern world. What if I should marry Trémor? He is young, and no fool. Perhaps I might make something of him — a member of the Institute, who knows? And it would be easy for me to wheedle him a second time. This Don Quixote, if he has not been turned from me, will believe everything I deign to tell him, if I know how to manage, bring tears into my eyes, make my hand tremble, and pronounce with art that expressive word: the past!

Yes, certainly Faustine Wronska was a woman to reason in this way.

And those tearful eyes, that quiver of a hand were the consolation Michel had come to seek. What a pity!

V

THE welcome of Monsieur and Madame Réault was cordial, even affectionate. Michel had forgotten Daran's advice and, during the evening, scarcely noticed Simone Chazé, the sister of Thérèse, a child of sixteen, who sat sewing beneath the lamp, graceful and quiet, with her long lashes lowered, but unconsciously he was imbued by the charm of this little brand new home. He looked with interest at the simple furniture and soft colours to which the light silk shade gave a rose-hued tint; he smiled at Jacques Réault, who seemed so ingenuously proud of his wife, though her sole beauty was immense eyes and the figure of a well-formed Parisian.

Daran was right; flowers embellish and perfume everything. There were flowers in the little close room, warm to the heart and the eyes.

The young man thought sorrowfully of the Réaults' pleasant home when on the following day, by one of the early trains, he reached his hermitage in the tower of Saint-Sylvère. Yet he loved his strange dove-cote, loved it, though he had passed sad hours there, or perhaps on that very account.

Still standing proudly mournful in its solitude, like the last champion of a lost cause, the old donjon emerged from the shade of a little leafy park, separated from the woods by a fence, in which grew, under the trees and in the open air, the grass of the fields and forests, the

flowering grass that no roller levels and which the sun embalms when the scythes have cut it.

Colette had often teased Michel about his fancy for climbing plants. "Little creatures that want to rise above the level of everyone else, which mount, mount, mount, always, and when forced to stop before reaching the moon and stars are grieved to the point of awaking in tears every morning. That is what pleases you, oh, most symbolising of brothers."

And it was a fact that climbing plants abounded in the tower of Saint-Sylvère; in the summer, the grey walls of the building and the brown trunks of the trees bloomed into an exquisite flowering of honeysuckles, wistaria, jasmines and roses, roses especially, and all day long there was a sleepy concert of bees drunk with pollen.

But, in the early spring, the rose bushes were scarcely commencing to bud, the wistaria was clinging to the stones with dry stems that seemed sapless, and the tower of Saint-Sylvère appeared to be welcoming only the swallows, because they were building or finding old nests there.

At the moment of entering the doorway, Michel had seen some of them flying about and pursuing each other against the rosy sky, and he asked himself whether these faithful inhabitants of his roof would never bring him the happiness of which they were said to be the harbingers. He was tired of Paris, of the noise, the crowd, and yet the fever of these last days, the phantom of the past which had suddenly appeared in the midst of the commonplaces of the present hour, made his stay in the tower of Saint-Sylvère gloomy.

The evenings were still cold. Huge logs, piled upon the wrought-iron andirons, were burning, crackling in the chimney piece whose entablature, emblazoned with the arms of the ancient lords of Saint-Sylvère, rose almost to the top of the walls of the study. The furniture of this apartment, like all that Trémor had collected in the tower of Saint-Sylvère, belonged to an ancient Norman style. By the flickering light of the fire the wardrobes, the sideboards, the rudely-carved oak chairs on which sometimes, amid the freaks of an artless and elaborately-wrought decoration, grinned some face of a chimera, seemed to have escaped from a sombre drawing of Gustave Doré; the books and papers heaped upon the shelves in a sacred disorder assumed the appearance of archives; the very old picture of a White Lady of the time of Queen Ysabeau, evoked the vision of a somewhat stiffly-attired châtelaine, who might have come to sit beside the hearth, near the wheel which for centuries had forgotten the delicate touch of a skilful spinner's fingers; the elaborate archaism of the tapestries was oddly emphasised, and still more extravagant appeared on the green background the outlines of animals or heraldic flowers, still more stiff the profiles of figures awkwardly grouped.

The hands of the wall clock had stopped; the daily work of the servants kept them on the lower story; neither the ticking of the pendulum, nor the rattling of glasses, nor the sound of footsteps disturbed the sudden, fantastic life of these familiar things. Michel fancied he heard the slow work of the worms in the ancient furniture.

The young man absently read a new novel he had bought in passing through the station, and felt himself alone, alone to the point of wondering why he had never had a dog, whose faithful gaze, full of the great mystery of incomplete or unfinished souls, would have sometimes sought his own.

His whole mind turned toward a change of horizon. He was tempted to cheat his impatience, to fly, to find at Cannes the charming affection of Colette, the cordial welcome of his brother-in-law, the caresses of his niece and nephew, but he was afraid of meeting Paris on the shores of the Mediterranean.

Michel did not remember having experienced at any period of his life such a feeling of desertion. After his rupture with Faustine, he had deadened his despair in a feverish life, then he had travelled, discovered in the actual sight of the countries to which his mind had often wandered, enjoyment which the persistent feeling of the recent deception could not stifle. Now he was tired of these nomad habits; the world which he had not wholly traversed seemed to him so small and so little varied.

Then, as the proverb artlessly says, "Misery loves company." It is rare that in the midst of a great sorrow we feel too much alone. To Michel the great sorrow had gradually lessened. When it wholly vanished, nothing replaced it in the heart which it had occupied so long. And lo! even the charm of the past disappeared like the rest. And nothing had palliated the bitterness of this last disenchantment.

There remained the possible hope of the joys of work, a work to which we devote ourselves. But if labour is

not stimulated by the necessity for securing the daily bread, it must be by the desire to satisfy an ambition, to realise an ideal of beauty, or to attain a useful end. Now Michel had doubts concerning his right to execute the work he had elaborated. Did his history of the Hétheens deserve to be written as he had conceived it from the documents which he had collected, a people whose mysterious fate had attracted his imagination, and whose traces he had patiently sought amid the dust of a vanished world, pursuing them through Egypt, Syria, Occidental Asia, finding them again in Europe confounded with those of the famous and obscure Pelasgians, who glide like vague shadows through the midst of the most ancient memories?

To write articles for newspapers and magazines, or a novel, is only to aspire to amuse for a moment a few idle people after having entertained one's self; to write a book which deserves the name, and especially a history, is to declare one's self capable of contributing in a certain degree to the edification of human knowledge from the standpoint of facts or their interpretation. Such was the positive theory of Michel and, as his solitary life had somewhat warped or overheated his ideas, he saw in such a desire an unduly presumptuous pride, instead of admiring in it the effort of a great courage which may be humble.

An agreeable woman of the eighteenth century has said that modesty is a languor of the mind. There might be some danger in taking this thought as a general truth; it would be favouring vanity with one pretext more; yet it is certain that an exaggerated self-distrust checks or

chills every enthusiastic dash toward an ideal goal and often causes people to believe themselves incapable of bringing to a satisfactory end any given task, because they unconsciously dread having to put forth the amount of effort that would be required not only for its accomplishment, but even the attempt.

Trémor, however, felt that a calm and stable existence might have invited him to make the trial, but though he should no longer find the gratification of former days in distant peregrinations, he did not know how to resolve to give them up.

On this evening of peevish meditation, Daran's objurgations returned to his memory.

He had desired this charming life with a tenderly beloved woman and because he had longed for it too much, because he had once been deceived, he forbade himself to hope, fearing to encounter the parody after having created the ideal.

His ardent youth had dreamed of a love very passionate and very pure and yet, with all his sentimental life, his luckless love for Faustine was the only one which would have corresponded with this dream, as Faustine was the only woman whose image he could again evoke without awakening in himself the sadness or the disgust of delusive memories. When he was ignorant of life, falsehood, vanity, he had loved this young girl because she was beautiful and he believed her to be good and sincere, and yet it was from her that he had received the harsh lesson. She had sacrificed the man who loved her to the meanest of passions; she had revealed to him the savage sharpness of selfish calculations and, brutally,

having nothing more to make out of his love and his credulity, had cast him off into life.

It was not in Michel Trémor's nature to fall into the exaggerations of pessimism, besides, he had guarded himself from too hasty generalisations and had left to Faustine the whole responsibility for her duplicity and treachery; only he had thought that certain accidents destroy an existence as others save it, and he was in despair over having been born under so unlucky a star. Perhaps — ever ready for self-distrust — he had told himself that the misfortune might be partly his own fault because, in order to win love, we must be lovable. And he felt that all passion was dead in his heart. The man whom he had become could no longer be enamoured of anything except the beautiful in art and nature, the good in life; he would never love again.

The worms continued their hidden work, and the fire died down. The forms of the warriors on the tapestry, and the fixed smile of the châtelaine, no longer appeared except when the flames flashed up.

Michel thought of the Réaults' pretty home, the quiet intimacy which constituted its charm, the children who would some day gladden it, and he envied the life which began in this peace and sweetness.

Children! He had always worshipped children, and always been worshipped by them. Ah! how he would have devoted his whole heart and mind to the task of rearing those who would have been flesh of his flesh. For their sakes how much better he would have made himself, more indulgent, more active in combating the violent impulses of a nature whose unity had been

changed by too long periods of isolation! With what solicitude he would have watched them, encouraging them to be open-hearted, inviting their confidence, accustoming them to absolute trust, and using this trust to develop in their souls all the powers of loving, every generous feeling, to cultivate their growing intelligence. He would have answered their questions with unfailing patience; he would have taught them himself, but he would have encouraged their sports in the open air, their happy merry laughs, their desire for movement and noise. And he would have loved them dearly; their kisses, their careless joy would have brightened the dark hours. Michel laughed at himself for a great gush of instinctive tenderness which rose from his heart for these shadows of his reverie.

For an instant the idea crossed his mind of adopting a child, one of the sons of a friend who had no fortune. But what would be the use? Never would he, the benefactor, the improvised father, reign over the heart of this child; never would he feel himself the master of this existence which he would not have created, which would belong to him only by virtue of a human contract. And in anticipation, jealousy murmured within him.

Another weakness of his suffering and imperfect nature! He was jealous; the "green-eyed monster" had often tortured him. Through association of ideas, Michel remembered the far-off time when he had devoured the tears which only pride prevented his shedding, because Colette had said to a girl friend, "I love you as much as I do my brother." He recalled the days that had preceded and followed Faustine's marriage, the de-

spair, the fits of rage, the longing to murder which excited him to frenzy.

He thought, "I was made to suffer and to cause suffering. It is better that I should have lived alone."

Before going into the summer-house which she occupied, Jacotte, the gardener's wife, who filled the position of cook, came to offer Michel a cup of lime-flower tea. At first he refused, then he allowed her to give him the fragrant infusion, and mechanically stirring it with the little silver spoon, he asked a few questions, enquired for her old mother who kept a tavern in Rivailler; her son, who had gone away to school in the autumn. He needed to talk, to hear some voice. And Jacotte, who was loquacious, not confining herself to answers, told interminable stories, in which the rabbits, the chickens, the garden, and Tristan, Michel's horse, played an important part. Her tone, in speaking of everything that lived and grew at the tower of Saint-Sylvère, was something like the one she used in saying, "My son."

"Good night and pleasant dreams, sir," she concluded, going away with a vigorous tread that made the teapot and the china cup rattle on the waiter.

The young man went to sleep in his big, old-fashioned bed. By a resemblance that amused him, the worthy woman's cordial chatter had suddenly reminded him of his friend Albert's flowing speeches.

Every year Daran hired a little house at Rivailler. Michel thought that the good fellow would soon be there, and he suddenly felt a serene joy.

The next morning, roused by a sunbeam which shone through the leaden-cased frames, he made some heroic

resolutions. He threw the windows wide open, admitted to his study the light and fragrance of the outside world, then he outlined the formidable classification of the documents which he had collected for his Essay of a History of the Hétheens. But, towards evening, several letters were brought in, one of which caused him positive bewilderment, followed by sharp displeasure.

Written in an unknown feminine hand, it was dated thus; Précroix, April 2nd, 190—, and couched in the following terms:

"*Sir:*

"Your letter of yesterday has greatly astonished me. We know each other so slightly! Yet it is true that we were not born to remain strangers to each other and, from what I know of you, your character, and what I have seen of society in your country, I should be very ungracious if I were not flattered by your offer and the sacrifice you are making of your national prejudices. Even admitting that this particular case presents some extenuating circumstances in my favour, I am not ignorant that a Frenchman of your world gives proof of a certain degree of courage in marrying a governess whom this circle has known in this position.

"Perhaps I ought to ask you to allow me time for reflection, perhaps you will find in my prompt and almost final reply a lack of reserve, of feminine dignity. Yet you have understood that I am a little unlike your countrywomen since, neglecting to apply to Madame Béthune's intervention, you have addressed yourself directly to me. So I will act with as much frankness

and plainness as you yourself have done. I will accept your proposal to be your wife.

"And now, my dear Michel — it is perfectly natural that I should call you so, is it not? — it seems to me that I should have a thousand things to say to you, about yourself, myself, your lovely sister. Just think, I suspected nothing, nothing at all! How well you have hidden your game!

"But your letter is dated from Paris, and I do not know whether you have since returned to the tower of Saint-Sylvère, to which I am addressing mine. As soon as you arrive, come to Précroix, I beg you, and we will talk together. Only then shall I be able to consider you quite my engaged husband.

"I know that French good breeding is very ceremonious, but I do not fully grasp its formulas, so please receive with indulgence the expression of my kindest regards.

"S. Severn."

Michel almost asked himself if he were not the sport of an illusion caused by the obsession of the counsels of Daran and the plans of Colette.

Château de Précroix — a foreigner, a teacher — the Béthunes' teacher — S. Severn —

"Sarah!" he cried, "Miss Sarah! The governess, that sentimental old maid! Who could have plotted this stupid joke and written such a letter?"

But he reread the letter carefully and since it was written simply, in good French, without any romantic affectation, he might conclude that it was not to be at-

tributed to a hoaxer, who would not have failed to insert the most sentimental tirades, to accumulate the most poetical epithets, and to scatter through it the most grotesque Anglicisms. The tone, on the contrary, was frank, serious, sensible. A letter of this sort had been written without the slightest intention of being droll; nay, even when thinking of the old maid's age and absurdities, the "we were not born to remain strangers to each other," a delicate reminiscence of the theory of sister souls, the fear expressed of seeming over bold, the allusions to a very doubtful youth which artlessly apologised for not taking alarm, the somewhat unduly prompt "my dear Michel," scarcely provoked a smile.

As for the deliciously candid "I suspected nothing at all; how well you have hidden your game!" the hoaxer would have replaced by a phrase of this sort, "I scarcely dared to believe myself loved!" or, "I forbade myself to see in your attentions anything save compassion," a reminder of the somewhat tiresome teasing in which Madame Béthune and her son had found pleasure the year before, after the evening when Michel, sympathising with the solitary, had sat down beside Miss Sarah, and talked with her agreeably about the pleasant weather and education in America.

After reflection, doubt was difficult. The letter which had just reached the tower of Saint-Sylvère was really the result of a bad joke, but it could not be the direct work of a spiteful wag. The poor governess had written it herself in her best and clearest style; she had answered without suspicion an offer which she had

actually received. While Michel was recalling the old teasing of his friends at Précroix, he also remembered the more recent mischievous plans of Claude. Delighted with his practical jokes upon the usher who was to be humbugged, and knowing that Michel's handwriting was easily imitated, the student had thought it amusing to extend the field of his operations and to address an "April Fool" to poor Miss Sarah, who had taken the matter seriously and read the amazing missive without noticing the fatal date.

Offended at having been mixed up in this ridiculous business, and full of pity for the unfortunate woman whom Claude's thoughtless trick affected more closely than it did himself, Michel was on the point of going to Précroix, giving Madame Béthune the letter he had just received, and informing against the future college graduate. Then he considered that Madame Béthune would tell her husband and the latter who, when carried away by anger, measured neither his words nor his acts, might perhaps inflict upon Claude too harsh, and especially too brutal a punishment. The wisest and most humane plan was to lecture Claude privately, telling him to address a letter of explanation and apology to Miss Sarah. Michel decided to write to his young friend the next morning; Béthune, who was going to Chantilly, would know nothing about the matter, and the incident would close without too much injury.

For an instant Michel amused himself at the thought of how Daran and Colette would have looked on receiving the triumphant news of his engagement to Miss

Sarah! Then he forgot Claude and his mischievous trick, went down into the little park, walked under the trees, breathed the air of the woods, and found pleasure in noting the growth of his precious plants — which were trying to "mount to the stars."

VI

MICHEL of course gave up the plan formed the night before of going to Précroix. On no account would he have risked finding himself in close quarters with his happy and timid fiancée. The bare thought of the significant smile with which she would not have failed to greet him, made him shudder.

Strolling across the country he went to Rivailler, where he had to inspect a cottage which Jacques Réault wanted for the summer months.

The various entertainments in honour of the patron saint crowded the village. Michel took in his way the harness maker Camus, owner of the Villa des Saules, and explained the object of his visit. The cunning peasant, aided by his still more crafty wife, wasted in circumlocution, prudent withdrawals, and propositions more prudent still, ten full minutes of a quarter of an hour's conversation, but an understanding was finally reached, and Michel, leaving him, inhaled the outdoor air with delight. On both sides of the main street people were standing in front of booths ornamented with various glass trinkets. On the square the festival was in full swing. Deafened by the music of the wooden horses, the cries of the pedlars, the firing, Trémor patiently worked his way through the crowd. Before a pastry cook's shop, half a dozen little ones with dirty faces and ragged clothes were looking enviously at the

macaroons which the luckier children of a Rivailler farmer were winning at every shot, and instantly crunching.

The young man felt sorry for these juvenile outcasts of the festival. One, the tallest, was explaining how the machine worked, and that a needle showed the number of macaroons won. He had eaten them himself, twice, and he knew they "smelt of almonds" and "melt in your stomach." The others listened wondering, with their fingers in their mouths.

"Poor little chaps!" thought Michel, and went up to them.

"Come," said he, "each of you shoot three times; gently, without fighting," he added to moderate the enthusiasm which was already appearing.

The young savages had no idea of thanking their benefactor. Yet the tall one who so well understood the mechanism of lotteries and the taste of macaroons had remained behind. Standing bolt upright before Trémor he took off his woollen cap, and with sparkling eyes, exclaimed boldly:

"Well, you're a good kind of a swell, after all." And off he went to join the others.

While Michel, amused by the compliment, was paying for the eighteen shots, someone touched him on the shoulder with the handle of a sunshade.

"Well, young man! So you are treating the children? I thought you were in Paris," said a voice marked by a very characteristic American accent.

Michel turned and saw a tall, fair young woman. Radiant with blooming strength in her spring costume,

she led by the hand two little girls, healthy and smiling like herself.

On the other side of the street a group of society folk were practising the cross-bow amid laughter and exclamations. Trémor would never have thought that so numerous and fashionable a party could have been assembled at Rivailler the first of April. May Béthune would have invented social relations in the Sahara, and transformed into flirts the rocks of the Cordilleras.

Béthune had married her for her large dowry, and no one had ever exactly understood why she had wedded Béthune. He struggled on the Bourse to make money, she in society for success, and they met so rarely that they agreed wonderfully well.

May delighted in finery, gossip, and extravagance, but her frankness, her gaiety, her naturalness, pleased Michel who, while regretting that Colette, already so superficial, was so intimate with the most foolish and frivolous of women, was a very sincere friend of the beautiful American.

"I have just arrived, dear Madame," said Michel in reply to the little reproach tacitly implied.

And having pressed the hand extended to him, he kissed the little girls.

"You must tell me a story," said Maud.

"And you must draw me a wolf," said Claire.

"Two stories and two wolves," promised Trémor, laughing.

Then, addressing the mother:

"I have heard through Colette that you are undertaking enormous improvements at Précroix."

Placing her tortoise-shell folding eyeglass on her nose, May Béthune surveyed the young man a moment, with a significant smile upon her lips.

"And I," she retorted in a low tone, "have learned through someone else a very surprising bit of news."

Michel, astonished, questioned her with his eyes.

"So, with you, we must always anticipate the unexpected," she went on. "You are a man of surprises. Still I don't exactly understand this American style of betrothal. Colette is delighted, isn't she?"

She spoke with her usual volubility, yet a very slight pause suddenly permitted her to notice the bewilderment on Trémor's face, and she interrupted herself.

"The news was told me under the seal of secrecy; your letter was not shown me; don't be troubled; I haven't mentioned it to a living soul," she said gaily.

Then pointing to her flying squadron:

"Go and tell her some implied compliment," she said; "it will be a great charm in this crowd."

"But, Madame —" Michel tried to protest.

"Go, go, I won't keep you. Susy, Susy —"

At the name a young girl turned and took several steps away from the group of archers. Michel saw a flushed, smiling face, prettily framed in the very high collar of a cloth cape, and recognised the bicyclist of the Green Sepulchre.

Very femininely attired this time in a black velvet toque and a light grey dress, the long folds of whose skirt fell softly to her ankles, she seemed to Michel less childish, taller, and much prettier than in the masculine sporting costume. Almost instantly the young girl met

the gaze of her last week's guide, and a very fleeting blush crimsoned her complexion.

As for Michel, the most detestable image would have terrified him less than this juvenile apparition. For an instant he was bewildered. Was Claude's victim, the April Fool fiancée, this young girl? What could he say? What could he do? How was he to disclose to this poor child in a public place, the absurd plot whose sport she had become? At last, feeling that he must say something, no matter how foolish, Michel managed to utter in an almost natural tone this phrase alluding to the adventure at the Green Sepulchre, without either confirming or denying the assertions of Madame Béthune.

"You have not yet had any news from the knight, Mademoiselle?"

The smile in the young girl's eyes spread joyously over her whole face.

"Why, yes," she replied, looking frankly at Michel, while little Maud rushed at her and with a shout of laughter threw both arms around her waist.

Madame Béthune had come up.

"You will be expected at Précroix to-morrow morning, Mr. Savage!"

Michel answered by a mechanical smile which might in case of necessity pass for acquiescence, then saying that he must write an important letter before mail time, made his escape.

He returned home in a state of mental confusion impossible to describe, but he had no time to devote to conjectures concerning the new and disastrous complications of Claude's mischievousness. A letter from Colette

awaited him which gave the clue to the enigma in a tone whose delight exasperated his distress.

"Brother dear, you are a naughty sly boots! Your adventure at the Green Sepulchre is delicious! But do you know through whom I heard of it to-day, and who was the heroine? Really, I can scarcely believe that you have both changed sufficiently not to recognise each other. I am wondering whether without knowing it, you two were not playing the same game, since when she at last discovered your name, the little maid would not tell you her own. Certainly I could desire no prettier frame to my brother's interview with my little Zanne, and it would now appear frightfully commonplace to present Monsieur Michel Trémor to Miss Suzanne Severn-Jackson (Severn is the name of her adopted father) in an ordinary drawing-room.

"Poor little girl! I was very glad to see by her letter that she is at Précroix with May Béthune, who spoils and pets her as I would myself. I am almost horrid enough to congratulate myself that Miss Stevens should have been ill enough to have a secretary become useless and a nurse necessary. All these things were to happen. Miss Sarah had to irritate May all winter and Miss Stevens take to her bed in the spring for my gentle cousin, Maud and Claire's governess, to meet one rainy day, in the woods of Rivailler, the lord of the dove-cot of Saint-Sylvère?

"Write to me soon; I am in a hurry to learn through you the romance of the Green Sepulchre.

"Robert thinks we shall leave Cannes towards the 18th of this month and reach Castelflore before the first

of May — just at the time, alas! when the Béthunes will go to Florence and my brother will bury himself in the fogs of the fiords, to return to us in the guise of a Scald, or still worse, an Ibsen thinker! Wicked savage, but I love you all the same.

"Your Colette."

Michel folded the letter in four pieces, tore it up and tossed the scraps into the fireplace. The Béthunes' governess was no longer Miss Sarah, but Miss Severn, and Miss Severn was the bicyclist of the Green Sepulchre, the granddaughter of Aunt Régine, the young cousin whom Colette still called by her childhood name, little Zanne who, at fifteen, fell asleep so peacefully at dessert. It really did seem as if trivial incidents had combined to lead to the same result, but Michel was far from facing the effect of so many causes with the same serenity as his sister. A fatality had led him into the snare — the question was to escape from it.

Though enlightening one obscure point, Colette's letter gave the young man no aid in unravelling to his own satisfaction a ridiculous situation. The plan of writing to Claude became impracticable. The mission of undeceiving the principal victim of the imprudent jest was now of too delicate a nature for it to be wise to entrust it to the culprit. The most sensible plan was still to tell Madame Béthune everything and leave it to her woman's tact.

All his compassion centred around the little stranger cousin. Simply, without hesitation, she had deigned to bestow her beautiful youth upon the man by whom she

believed herself beloved, and he was going to say brutally: "You accept me, who am gloomy, disagreeable, disgusted with a number of things; but I refuse you, who are the embodiment of beauty, hope, and joy."

Poor child! She had already suffered, deprived successively of her relatives, her grandmother, her uncle, all the natural protectors of her weakness and inexperience; but at twenty we rarely lose confidence in life, fear it, or do not expect from it some delicious surprise. And undoubtedly, little Zanne was smiling at the future, not imagining that any one could ever answer with a stern glance that glowing smile. Michel would change this happy confidence to shame, and flying from her betrothed husband of a day, perhaps the poor little governess might leave the kindly household where she had been welcomed. Master Claude's jest was becoming a tragedy.

Michel again took up Miss Severn's letter.

No, surely Michel Trémor and Régine Brook's granddaughter were not born to remain strangers to each other, and it would have been quite natural that this big cousin should become the support of the poor little relative who was alone in the wide world.

Suzanne was pleased because Michel forgot that she had earned her living, or did not blush for it as many others would have done. She was surprised that he had hidden his game so well. She thought he had taken pleasure in feigning ignorance. In truth, if Michel had not recognised his cousin that day, would he have addressed to her a short time after an offer of marriage?

At the end of her letter, wearied of the word "Mon-

sieur," she said, "My dear Michel" to her grandmother's nephew.

Finally, as if some fear had embarrassed her lest she might have appeared too unlike young French girls, she sought a very correct formula in closing.

Michel laughed at himself for having attributed to Miss Sarah this thoroughly juvenile letter. He accused himself, he accused Claude, he even accused Colette, who must have transformed her brother into a paladin to present to Suzanne's imagination.

Then his thoughts wandered into another course. Miss Severn, alone, poor or nearly so, sought for a fortune and a position in society; she had grasped her first opportunity. In this case the young girl's humiliation had no reason to sadden Mademoiselle Morel's former lover; on the contrary, it avenged him. Michel even tried to take pleasure in this idea; but it was in absolute contradiction to the generosity of his nature, and he abandoned it to laugh very bitterly at the foolish figure he was going to cut the next day in the presence of Madame Béthune.

Just as he left the table Albert Daran dropped from the skies, and he uttered a sigh of relief. Dragging the newcomer into his tapestried chamber, he mournfully told him the strange story, but its effect was unexpected. Daran roared with laughter till he was out of breath.

"Capital," he cried, "we agreed that the part of a 'marrying man' would not suit you, and wished that some charming girl might save you the vexations of too long a courtship and the doubts which precede an offer of marriage — Here she is!"

At his friend's outburst of mirth, Trémor bit his lips.

"I don't feel in the mood for jesting," he said coldly. "I am annoyed, harassed by an absurd story; I told you to obtain advice. Since you can give me only sarcasms, let us drop the subject. How long do you expect to stay at Rivailler?"

"A week," replied the collector quietly. Then, after a pause, he said suddenly:

"Why don't you marry this young girl?"

"Why?" repeated Michel, thoroughly excited. "Why, upon my word, you are crazy. Did I ever mean to marry? And if I did, should I be fool enough to marry a girl I scarcely know, and whom I do not love!"

"Whom you do not love with the emotions of a Ruy Blas or an Antony, but —"

"Whom I simply do not love," interrupted Michel.

"But," Daran went on with the same composure, "I don't see that it is indispensable to love so passionately the woman we marry. Very sensible marriages occur every day in which love crazes no one. They are often the happiest."

"Money matches!"

"Not at all. There are some men who marry to have a pleasant home and children. If Miss Severn is agreeable, intelligent, passably pretty, and in good health, I repeat — I do not see why you shouldn't marry her."

Seated in an armchair, Michel was drumming on the oak wainscoting without looking at Daran. Suddenly he turned, laughing bitterly.

"*Michel* or *The Bridegroom in spite of Himself!* A

bad Scribe vaudeville! Do you know what I am going to do? I shall leave to-morrow and write from the North Cape to Madame Béthune to disentangle her son's prank! You are certainly unique. If there was advice which I did not expect from you or anyone else, I confess that it was to endorse the responsibility of an absurd letter written in my name by an ill-bred student, and to marry any girl in consequence of an April Fool joke."

"It is not, any young girl," objected Daran. "It is your cousin and the wife your sister intended for you. As for that little scamp, Claude's, letter, it could not be so badly composed, since it was taken seriously."

"You will make out that I shall be under obligations to Claude."

"Quite possible, my dear fellow."

"At any rate you will admit that I am the only competent judge of the affair?"

"Oh! absolutely," replied Daran. "Have you heard from Monsieur Fauvel?"

"Yes."

"Good news?"

"Excellent."

"His laryngitis?"

"Completely cured."

"So much the better! A lawyer ought not to be troubled with his larynx!"

The conversation continued in this vein of agreeable commonplaces, then, after a silence, Michel resumed:

"Don't you understand that I should show monstrous selfishness in marrying this young girl? Ah! if I were

twenty! Perhaps then I should lull myself with charming illusions, perhaps I might say to myself, 'She is pretty, attractive, shall I love her?' But I am thirty; I know life and, above all, myself. A clear complexion and beautiful eyes are not enough to turn my head. I do not love this child; admitting that, in the future, a sincere affection might bind me to her, I know that she would never inspire a profound, ardent love; I know that never, through me, would she obtain the devotion she desires, that she has a right to desire, that she doubtless expects from me."

As Daran gently shrugged his shoulders, the young man went on:

"Do me the favour to believe that I do not consider myself irresistible! But it is said that the race of romantic young girls has not yet vanished from this world. Remember the circumstances in which Miss Severn and I met, the hour passed beside the tomb of the knight who died for love — and the name she wrote on the wall to obey the legend. Poor little thing! She thought I resembled the knight. And three days after the commencement of this chapter from George Sand or Feuillet —"

"Plus the bicycle."

"She receives Claude's letter! She must have instantly gathered in her obliging memory a hundred false examples with which to build a romance and persuade herself that she was tenderly beloved. The thunderbolt! Just think of it! If the hero was unworthy of the poem, never mind! You will see that, thanks to the extravagant stories of Colette, and the tale of the

knight, this child has performed the miracle of transforming me into a hero of romance, as you said the other day —"

"Highly probable, certainly," assented Daran, lighting a cigarette; "only I don't see what harm this metamorphosis — if metamorphosis there is — could do."

"Yet it is perfectly clear. Proud of being adored by a legendary personage, the poor girl would suddenly open her eyes wider and find herself in the presence of an ordinary man who married her from idleness, to put an end to the thing, as we say. What a deception! If I thought seriously of marrying Suzanne Severn, I should wish her to know what I have told you."

"There's nothing easier," replied Albert; "you could tell her."

"Yes, perhaps so. Then she would answer: 'You are not the man I expected; good-bye.'"

Daran had mechanically picked up a magazine, and was turning its leaves without reading it.

"If I were you," he said, "I shouldn't go out of my way to look for trouble — I should let myself be attracted by the charm of this delightful romance. Perhaps by dint of persuading myself that I was a very presentable Feuillet hero, I might some day become one. It is faith that saves us. At any rate, I should be very much flattered to be regarded as such by beautiful eyes. The 'Romance of a rich young man' is less poetic than —"

"You are mistaken," replied Michel. "It would be very natural for Miss Severn to have the feelings I described — and this without my having the least reason

to brag of it, since, under the same circumstances, any other man would have aroused them as much as I. Yet if she admitted or allowed me to divine them, I might not be able to believe in their sincerity; I might possibly regard it as a farce. The poor young girl who trades in her life, and pretends to love because she has not the courage of her act in the presence of the man whom she is to marry — ah, that is no new thing to me, unfortunately."

This time Daran laid down the magazine, and turning his chair to see Michel more distinctly, said:

"What is it you want? You detest money matches, but you don't believe in the good faith of poor young girls; you don't understand marriages of convenience, but you would be afraid to be married through romantic impulse; you esteem only love marriages, but you vow never to love your wife; you scorn young girls who wed from calculation, but you say that if anyone should show love for you, you would not believe her sincere. What *do* you want?"

"I don't want to marry, that is all. And I should have wished that my name might not be mixed up in a ridiculous story. You may be sure that I don't mean to sacrifice my liberty to an April Fool joke of Claude Béthune."

"It is certain," replied Daran in a conciliatory tone, "that you are not responsible for young Béthune's follies, nor for Miss Severn's heedlessness in not noticing the date of the letters she receives. You will explain the situation very delicately to Madame Béthune, who will tell Miss Severn — again very delicately — that if

you felt the slightest inclination to marry, you would have been rejoiced to devote yourself to her happiness, but that — Really, you are quite right, it is nothing but a vaudeville scenario!"

"Oh! you call it a vaudeville scenario," cried Michel, with great inconsistency; "you think it droll and amusing to say to a young girl, 'Mademoiselle, you are charming to have accepted my name, but I would not consent at any cost to give it to you.'"

"It isn't you who would tell her so. You take everything tragically."

"Oh, I beseech you, Daran!" said the young man, clasping his forehead with both hands.

And, during the remainder of the visit, they talked of other things.

The remark of Michel's friend reminded him of the reflections he had made at the time of his unfortunate meeting with Claude.

Why should he torment himself beyond measure with this vaudeville situation? To exaggerate its importance was to emphasise its absurdity. Claude's "April Fool" ought to be laughed at. If Miss Severn had any wit, she would be the first to be amused.

But the difficulty, in such cases, is to know how to laugh without appearing detestable. All the diffidence of former days awoke in Michel, and he overwhelmed himself with the futile questions we ask ourselves after a deed is done. Why had he not waited for summer before leaving Paris? Why had he not started for Norway? Why had he even spent the winter in France? Why, on receiving the letter which he then thought old

Miss Sarah had written, did he not tell Madame Béthune, instead of foolishly waiting for fresh complications? Why had he not, that very day, had the courage to deny the absurd engagement on which he was congratulated?

Daran's counsels had irritated Michel as utterly stupid, yet one still occupied his mind on account of the surprise, the bewilderment, instantly followed by rebellion, which he had felt. How could the idea that he, Trémor, would profit by Claude's prank to marry his cousin Suzanne, ever have entered Daran's head?

Of all the issues from a situation whence he desired to escape with the least possible awkwardness, this was perhaps the only one Michel had not himself studied before his friend's arrival. Now, more indulgent to Daran's divagations, he smiled at them, regretting his anger.

Weary of living alone and haunted by the feeling of lassitude which had succeeded an almost morbid preference for solitude, he finally reached the point of saying to himself that Daran was right in one respect, and that a marriage which would bestow peace, family joys, and the charm of the fireside, might in fact realise an ideal of happy life without being necessarily the result of a passionate love.

Michel did not think of marrying Suzanne Severn; in the first place it would have given a ridiculous close to a jest which was in very poor taste, and he dreaded ridicule; it was one of his weaknesses; then, admitting that some day he ought to marry, he should desire only a sensible union, from which the romantic element would be rigorously banished. Yet perhaps, in the future, he

would be less on the defensive when Colette sang the praises of some young girl.

For an instant Michel saw passing through the dusky room a slender figure which was neither that of the bicyclist of the Jouvelles woods nor the pretty American of the festival, yet which did not seem to have escaped from the frame where perpetually smiled the White Lady of the tower. Vague, airy, she glided from one piece of furniture to another. Was she arranging flowers in the old Rouen china? Michel closed his eyes and tried to believe that someone was there, that a voice would soon speak to him, that if he held out his hand, a smaller one would slip into his clasp. For an instant the bright, frank glance of Simone Chazé flashed from the darkest corner and the smiling lips of Marguerite Sainval, a very pretty brunette whom Michel had often met in Madame Fauvel's drawing-room, uttered mysterious words. Then the little American tried to drive away the frank eyes and interrupt the smiling lips by saying:

"My name is sweeter than that of Allys. I am the Knight's promised bride. Why do you evoke other images than mine?"

But Michel answered:

"You are romance, poesy; romance and poesy have deceived me; all is over between us. Do not await the knight; he is lying lifeless on his couch of stone. No name could stir his heart or raise his lashes, not even yours, however sweet it may be; not even the name of other days, the name which was his last sigh, and which he now forgets in the eternal slumber."

VII

ABOUT ten o'clock Michel had had Tristan saddled and gone to Précroix, where he had asked for Madame Béthune. Now, standing before the window in the little drawing-room, he waited, looking out of doors.

It was a grey morning with mists clinging to the trees and, at times, showers of fine rain mournfully veiling everything. Dreary, dismal weather!

The hour of explanations had struck. Like a child about to recite a half-learned lesson, Michel was preparing phrases. Almost as diffident as in his youth, beneath the artificial ease which he had succeeded in acquiring, he would never have dared to give himself up to the inspiration of the moment. So, in this strange conjuncture of circumstances, he felt a certain comfort in evoking the frank face of May Béthune. This worldling was a woman whom nothing astonished, yet this woman whom nothing astonished was infinitely kind beneath her frivolous manners. She would perform the mission to Suzanne with tact and gentleness. Who knows whether, in her desire to compensate for the blunders of her son Claude, she might not arrange for Miss Severn a brilliant revenge, make some Prince Charming appear as if in the last act of a fairy tale. Thanks to her, little Zanne, in the joy of the new betrothal, would speedily console herself for having been unappreciated by the gloomy owl in the tower of Saint-Sylvère.

At last the young man heard steps, and Madame

Béthune entered. Unfortunately, she was not alone. Radiant, with the joy of youth, as usual, sparkling on her lips and in her eyes, she came forward with one arm around the waist of Miss Severn, who was also smiling, a flush on her cheeks. After shaking hands they sat down with a rustle of silken skirts, and a conversation began, light, cordial, yet seemingly waiting for the "something serious" that was to come.

At first Michel had said gravely, "Mademoiselle," and May had laughed at him. Cousins! It was ridiculous! Then he had avoided addressing Suzanne directly or finding himself compelled to use any title in speaking to her, and he soon noticed that the young girl maintained the same reserve.

The word engagement had not been uttered, but it was in the air, inevitable, and Michel felt the impression of an invisible net which would be slowly woven around him. It was in fact almost as difficult to confess the truth to Madame Béthune in Miss Severn's presence as to suggest to Miss Severn a withdrawal that would have rendered an explanatory conversation with Madame Béthune possible.

At the end of a few minutes, the young matron touched upon the burning subject:

"I was certain that Susy's letter would have to follow you to Paris, and I expected to see your ugly handwriting, and not your agreeable self at Précroix."

"I found my cousin's letter on arriving, and I was going to Précroix when I met you yesterday, but you had so many people with you, that I seized the first

pretext to escape," replied Michel with a composure in lying which astonished himself.

"Poor fellow! Without knowing it, I was very cruel in changing your plans so," returned Madame Béthune. "And Colette, what does she say to the events of the day?"

"Colette knows nothing," said Michel, feeling more and more muddled, but thinking that this time, at least, he was not committing the slightest offence against the truth.

With a comical gesture May raised her clasped hands toward the ceiling, then let them fall into her lap.

"Don't open your eyes too wide, my dear," she cried. "Monsieur Trémor is an oddity, whom no one will ever make commonplace. Colette and I warned you."

"I suppose you have been told much evil about me — Cousin?"

"A great deal."

"Oh, I find no fault with it; perhaps they have been even too indulgent."

"If you are fishing for a compliment, I warn you that you won't get it, but I am going to allow you plenty of leisure to justify yourself against our charges," said Madame Béthune, rising.

She added:

"My dear, you are an American and Michel Trémor is originally from some still unknown planet, so I can act outside of French conventionalities. Good-bye for the present."

The sound of the door closing upon the stylish figure echoed like a knell in the ears of the unfortunate Trémor.

He would fain have found words to detain Madame Béthune, wonderfully clever phrases to entreat her to have patience a moment and to take Suzanne away, but all spontaneity of invention failed him. Even before he could mentally grasp the consequences of this flight, Miss Severn's voice brought him back to the pressing reality.

"You are eccentric, that is *true!*" said this voice, emphasising the word.

Michel looked at his cousin inquiringly.

"Did not you recognise me at once at the Green Sepulchre?" she asked.

"No," he answered evasively.

"When you recognised me, why didn't you tell me so?"

"I might answer you by the same question," replied Michel smiling.

"Oh! I only wanted to have a little fun," returned the young girl. "At first, to tell the truth, I was a bit afraid of you, then when I understood who you were, all my fear vanished; then the adventure seemed so comical that I took care not to rob it of its bloom by exchanging cards. I had little doubt, however, in speaking of it to Madame Béthune and writing to our friend Claude, that the knight must play a part in my life. Did you know at that time that I was Maud and Claire's governess?"

"No," answered Trémor.

But though he clearly realised that his shuffling would end by giving him a sort of complicity in Claude's pranks, he did not yet have courage to explain himself,

and vowing that this evasion should be the last, added:

"I knew through Colette that you were in Cannes at the same time as Madame Béthune and had arrived there with one of her old friends, so I could not be surprised at your presence at Précroix. I thought that Maud and Claire were still under the charge of Miss Sarah."

"Ah! yes," cried Suzanne with a charming laugh. "You thought of Miss Sarah, when I alluded to the Béthunes' governess. Then you did not know that I was earning my living?" she asked more seriously.

"Colette had written that you were with Miss Stevens as her reader," replied Michel quickly.

Was Suzanne going to accuse him of this base pettiness — contempt for women who earn their living!

"My poor Uncle John left me all his savings, but they were not very large; I am not rich. You must know that, too," Miss Severn went on with the same seriousness. "Six thousand dollars is a very small dowry, isn't it?"

This time Michel uttered a cry of protest.

"Oh! Mademoiselle!"

He was overwhelmed with self-reproach at the idea that this child might perhaps conclude, from a refusal preceded by so much hesitation, that a question of fortune or prejudice might have had some mean influence upon his determination. He must speak, and speak now, on pain of being a dishonest man. Yet had he still the right to do so?

At this expressive exclamation from her cousin, Suzanne smiled and said very frankly:

"Will you call me Suzanne? I do not know whether you still wish to marry me, but I am sure that I shall desire your friendship."

She held out her little hand.

"Thank you," said Michel, pressing it.

This assurance from Suzanne was indeed sweet to him when he thought of the task which he had to fulfil, so that a sort of emotion, consisting of apprehension as much as gratitude, thrilled in this thank you, robbing it of any triteness. But the lord of Saint-Sylvère tower was floundering more and more in the mire. Though he summoned to his aid all his strength of will, all his sincere desire to act loyally, the words stuck in his throat when he tried to say:

"I have waited until this hour to inform you that you have been foolishly, odiously deceived."

Besides, Miss Severn did not consider their engagement fixed. What was the meaning of her allusion to a possible rupture? Seizing this pretext, Michel clung to the hope of some obstacle raised by Miss Severn herself. He waited.

"You seem rather — silent, this morning, Cousin."

"I am often so," answered Michel.

And he thought that the young girl was surprised by his somewhat cold, or at least singular manner.

"Colette told me; she has talked about you a great deal. Don't you think that — that she had a little desire for our marriage?"

"I am sure of it — she desired it very eagerly, but —"

"But?"

"But if her somewhat blind affection for me could wish nothing more, it seems as if — her regard for you should have rendered her less exacting."

Miss Severn began to laugh.

"I am tempted to repeat Madame Béthune's words: 'Are you fishing for a compliment?'"

"A compliment! Oh! Good Heavens, no, I assure you!"

Unconsciously the sentence was spoken sorrowfully.

Suzanne made no reply, busying herself in carefully removing a little dry leaf which had caught in the wool of her gown, then suddenly pushing back, with an impatient gesture, the hair that rested on her cheeks, she fixed her candid gaze upon Michel.

"If I wanted to talk with you," she said, "it is because,— because, sincerely, I do not think I am the wife you need."

Michel started.

"Why?"

"For a number of reasons. In the first place, because you are a superior man, and I am just an ordinary little woman. Oh! don't protest, you know me so little that the praise would be meaningless. Next, because you are a sort of poet, a prose poet, if you like, but a thinker, a person captivated by fancies, and I am very practical. You must have noticed that there are two classes of 'marrying girls,' those who dream, and those who calculate. I see a third: those who reason — to which I belong, for I flatter myself that I am not mercenary, yet I could not boast of being in any way sentimental."

While thus expressing herself in very fluent French, oddly marked by an American accent, Michel was gazing at her.

In the English costume with a straight collar, which she wore this morning, Miss Severn looked much more like the bicyclist than the fashionable girl of the day before. But she resembled her like an older sister, the boyish vivacity of her manners tempered by feminine charm. At the Green Sepulchre Michel had thought her small and fragile; she was only slight and very refined, with a skin like snow, the rosy snow that floats in April in the blossoming orchards. Her hair, somewhat unusual in color, a light chestnut, waved naturally, without concealing the exquisite shape of her little head; her pretty mouth often smiled, showing a glimpse of small, white teeth; her eyes illumined her whole face. They were the "speaking eyes" Daran remembered; a somewhat humid blue, yet whose light was as cheering as a sunny day; eyes which always seemed to have something to say or to conceal; eyes which possessed a persuasive, sovereign charm; eyes which would have softened Hop o' my Thumb's ogre, haunted the dreams of a hermit less hardened than the one in the tower of Saint-Sylvère, and which had for an accomplice a saucy little nose slightly tip-tilted as if to better inhale the joy of life.

Suzanne Severn would have been considered anywhere an extremely pretty girl. Unless blind or singularly near-sighted, it would have been difficult not to admit this, and Michel's eyes were no worse than any other man's. For an instant, without any lover-like emotion,

he admired with genuine pleasure this delicate beauty, as he would have admired a rare flower.

"At the Green Sepulchre," Suzanne went on, "you were able to create some charming illusions about me. It was all very romantic — though you treated me like a baby — that meeting in the ruins, and the idea of writing my name on the walls was romantic too! I really don't know what nonsense entered my mind. I love legends, that is it. My prosaic Yankee imagination doubtless hides some little corner of mystery. It is an inheritance from my grandmother, your Aunt Régine. Ah, she was romantic! She sacrificed everything, family, future, native land, to a great love; yet I have often seen her weep, and she never spoke of my grandfather to me. She was not happy. I do not know whether her sadness inspired some unconscious distrust in me; but I have never longed for the marriage of love, so greatly desired by some girls. I don't think great passions are natural to me. You remember my French governess, the one who called me Zanne. Poor girl! She had a lover somewhere — she never married him, alas! — and in telling me her dreams, she was so droll that I reached the point of wondering whether, when people loved without being unhappy like grandmother, they were not compelled to be ridiculous, like Mademoiselle Gémier."

"You were not wrong. People are most frequently both ridiculous and unhappy."

"Besides, I will confess that marriage and love occupied my mind very little until Uncle John's death," Miss Severn continued calmly. "My simple, peaceful,

easy life as a young girl satisfied me — my somewhat serious studies, for Uncle John wished me to be capable of teaching; a few parties of young people of my own age, for he did not wish me to be entirely without entertainment; instructive reading in general (I don't care for novels) the management of our tiny home; my little attentions to Uncle John, who took the place of the father and mother whom I had never known and the grandmother I had just lost, were enough to fill my days. Oh! I won't make myself out any better than I am! I love pretty gowns, pretty rooms, luxury in all its forms, but when I saw my poor uncle working in an office for me at sixty years, I learned with pleasure to be economical and, when he returned happy to find me at home, I was as content as he in this narrow existence. Then — Uncle John died —"

Here Suzanne's voice faltered.

"Poor child," Michel murmured.

"Uncle John died," she went on; "I grieved deeply. Then I felt so small, so weak, so lost, that, for the first time, I thought of seeking a protector. But meanwhile, as I was not rich, I wanted to work. My good grandmother had reared me in the Catholic religion; she had given me a French teacher; her last wish, which Uncle John respected, had been that the very small sum she left me should enable me to spend six months in France and there study the French language. A short time before her death she had said, 'Promise me that, later, if your heart and your duty do not keep you in America, you will return to France and marry only a Frenchman.' I promised. I worshipped my grand-

mother, and through her I learned to love France as another native land. Alone in the world I remembered these things and, as Miss Stevens wanted to take to Paris and Cannes a young girl who was competent to help her in her correspondence and read to her, I came with her."

"To seek a husband?" asked Michel.

"First to earn a little money, and then to have some chance of finding myself near a Frenchman who was looking for a wife, Cousin."

Then, as Michel smiled, she added:

"I am sorry if I shock you, but tell me, when parents want to marry off their daughter, do they leave her sitting in the chimney corner? If they want to wed her to a manufacturer, do they throw her into a circle of artists, or if to a soldier, into a set of merchants? I, alas, I have no relative to attend to these things for me, and besides, do you suppose that young girls who do, never think of anything but the pleasure of dancing when they are taken to balls? Since I wished to marry, it was necessary to see some people, and to see people in France, as I wanted to marry a Frenchman. But be sure that if I was seeking a husband, as you say, I was not at all disposed to marry anyone I chanced to meet."

"I thank you," replied Trémor, bowing, with a touch of irony.

"You do right," replied the young girl, looking him squarely in the face.

Then, with the same calmness, she went on:

"I found two in succession. First, on the boat, a

merchant from Bordeaux, well off, but tiresome — and ugly! Oh! *dear!* — then at Cannes a Dutchman from Batavia who was not very long — I must do him that justice — in placing at my feet his name with ten millions and sextuple years. For my taste there were a little too many millions, and far too many years. I had no ideal, thank Heaven, but I had an idea!"

"And your idea?"

"My idea was to marry only a man young enough to share or understand my tastes, distinguished enough for me to be proud to go arm in arm with him, kind and loyal enough for me to have every confidence in him, intelligent enough to direct to my satisfaction his life and my own."

"In short, perfection?"

"That isn't all. I was going to add: rich enough to give me the luxury, the elegances, the pleasures I love. I would never marry a poor man. I am making you my profession of faith, so I wish it to be sincere. Love in a cottage, the slice of bread shared, etc.,— excellent in theory! But you know the vulgar saying, 'When there is no more hay in the manger, the horses fight.' I prefer a fine house to a cottage, and cakes to bread. Besides, I have often noticed that love matches are less frequent than people suppose, and — above all, less happy."

"Ah! you have made your little personal observations?"

"Often. I have friends who adored their lovers and who spend their time in speaking ill of their husbands. They are more or less jealous, they suffer agony about

any number of trivial things, while I see around me pleasant homes whose beginning was certainly not romantic. I will not quote the Béthunes, that I may not shock you. But Colette and Robert! There are two people contented with their fate, and who love each other warmly without dreaming of the impossible! Colette's household is my ideal. And now if you should say that I am very exacting and ambitious for a poor little governess, I should answer that, ambitious or not, I am absolutely mistress of my life; my little fortune places me above the reach of want; work bores, without frightening me; if I do not marry, I shall console myself for it very well. I belong, as I have confessed, to the class of young girls who reason. When you did me the honour to ask for my hand, I reasoned. You not only seemed to me to unite the requisite conditions, but you are also the brother of Colette, whom I dearly love, the nephew of my grandmother, whom I also loved dearly, and my cousin, whom I am inclined to love too. I could meet no better match. This is the reason I answered yes at once. But I am frank and thoroughly honest. If you had imagined me different, if you would desire to be adored by your wife and play the sentimental lover, do not marry me. I shall be a good little wife, a loyal comrade if necessary, I shall esteem you highly, I shall love you tranquilly, in my own way, but I don't know whether it is a good one — and I shall never adore you. I am entirely incapable of passionate love."

Suzanne Severn had made this little speech with calm

simplicity and a distinctness emphasised by the peculiarly clear tone of her voice.

Michel had listened, first with astonishment, then with a feeling of rebellion, at last with an indulgent curiosity. He had perceived by certain vibrations in the limpid voice that some little courage was needed in this great frankness, and the gaze of a pair of very pure eyes had allowed him to understand that there was much innocence underlying this boldness.

"You are a strange child," said he.

"I don't think so," she retorted; "only I have not spent half my time in dreaming of the stars, and the rest in reading novels; I know that life is not a romance, and that the stars shine far from the earth. Then, I am sincere, sincere with others, sincere with myself, which is often more difficult. But I imagine that my declaration of principles surprises you."

Michel could not help laughing.

"Yes, I thought —"

"You feared so?" repeated the young girl.

She was silent, reflected, then said deliberately:

"Michel, I am sure that you do not love me. Why do you want to marry me?"

There was a startled look in Michel's eyes; hitherto, he had listened indifferently, yielding to the course of events.

But Suzanne went on quietly:

"My experience of life, as well as of novels, is very brief; yet it seems to me that if you loved me, you would not have heard what I have just said with so much

calmness; it seems as if you would have already answered my last question. So you do not love me, and then — I am almost poor, I have no family, no relatives. Why should you wish me to become your wife? "

The question was plain. Why had it not been put sooner, before so many delays could make the young girl believe — if the truth was at last told her — that the man to whom she had thus confessed was playing with her and her confidence! Michel wanted to confess at the same time Claude's fault and his own, implore Suzanne's pardon, but an insurmountable shame checked the words on his lips, and he felt as guilty through the cowardice that had stopped him for an hour, as Claude through his cruel mischief. He gazed a moment at the figures in the carpet which whirled beneath his eyes, then he raised his head. He had reached his decision.

" You have been singularly frank with me, Suzanne, and it seems as if my candour should equal yours," he said, calling the young girl by her Christian name for the first time. " You are right; before I heard this, I knew you very slightly, but Colette is a poor artist, for she has given you an extremely false idea of me. Perhaps I have not always been so reasonable as you are; at any rate, I have become so, and if she ever met the enthusiastic poet, the dreamer she described, I defy her now to find him again. This poet was only a madman or even a fool; far from possessing your wisdom, he artlessly believed that the stars were not unattainable. He had a great deception, and found himself at once so miserable and so unhappy that he swore to cure himself of this sorrow of love — since the term is conse-

crated — and he kept his oath so well that he soon felt cured forever. Then he cried out that his life was crushed, and I think he died of the cure! I am speaking of the poet, for the remains of the catastrophe were picked up by a very practical man, fully inclined to make the most of them. It is this new philosopher whom you see to-day. I no longer dream of a great poem, a great love, nor a great happiness, Suzanne, and I have given up reaching the stars; only I don't know what to do with this poor shattered existence — and I should like to give it to you. I should like to have a fireside, family life, duties that snatch me from the selfishness of my barren journeys through the world. And if I ask permission to devote this life to you, to offer you the first place at this fireside, it is because I, too, have reasoned, because I know that you are intelligent and kind, because you, like myself, are alone, and because Colette loves you. You see that your sincerity has given me courage to show mine. I dare not, I will not tell you that I love you with the passionate emotion your beautiful youth should claim, but I can swear that your happiness shall be dearer to me than my own, and that you will find in me a devotion and care which will never fail. Will you be my wife?"

Michel looked intently at Suzanne, anxiously waiting for her reply, still vaguely hoping it might be a refusal.

But she answered smiling:

"Yes, Michel."

When Trémor, in the presence of the radiant Madame Béthune, took leave of his fiancée, he gently raised her hand to his lips.

"You will need a doll's ring," he remarked, still holding the little fingers in his own. There was no longer any trace of emotion in the young girl's face. Clasping her hands, with a look of entreaty in her eyes, she cried:

"Oh, please, a pearl, a pretty pearl; I am so fond of them."

The rain had ceased; a wan sunlight was gilding the greyish whiteness of the clouds. Madame Béthune and Suzanne accompanied Michel to the door steps, and while he was mounting, stood for a moment laughing and talking, shivering slightly in the damp atmosphere.

"We dine at seven!" May Béthune reminded Trémor as he rode off on Tristan, with a last greeting to the ladies.

When he had passed the entrance gate, the young man urged his horse to a quicker pace; he felt the need of cooling his forehead in the breeze, wearying his over-excited nerves by violent exercise.

On leaving Précroix, it seemed as if he had waked from a nightmare. But alas, the nightmare could not be separated from reality. Michel Trémor had just pledged his life.

Now a dull sense of anger seethed within him, mingled with a feeling of distress at the irrevocable nature of the act, but, somewhat scornfully, his resentment spared Suzanne. Why should the young girl be expected to be unlike the majority of her contemporaries? In comparison with the few who, before passively giving their lives, voluntarily bestow all their souls and minds, how many marry through ambition and vanity, to obtain a

relative independence, or merely to obey a social custom, and not risk dressing St. Catherine's hair?

Suzanne, feeling herself alone, almost poor, and ill suited for the daily battle of life, sought in marriage a protector and a fortune, and one must do her the justice of admitting that having decided to marry only a rich man, it was not enough that he should be merely wealthy to induce her to accept him.

Endowed, doubtless for her own happiness, with a practical mind, a tranquil imagination, a somewhat cold heart, and a calm temperament, she was a young girl like so many others, far more numerous than is believed by the young men who are ready to become infatuated with these mysterious little creatures; she was even something more. This honest child had acted like an honest man. It is true that, at first, Michel had been on the point of attributing Miss Severn's frankness to a sort of cynicism, but almost instantly he was tempted to feel an esteem for his cousin's character — though the sentiment was somewhat bitter. If Michel preferred a sincerity that bordered upon boldness to a reserve which touched hypocrisy, it was because he remembered.

However that might be, the young man's resentment was directed solely against the work of chance for whose cowardly acceptance he reproached himself, not merely because, evoked by the new betrothal, all the malice of former days returned, but because he already measured the full extent of the error he was about to commit; the strange child who had so frankly expressed her theories, saw clearly when she said she was not the woman who might have made him happy.

Having only a very commonplace life to offer the woman he should marry, he did not desire to quarrel with Miss Severn's positive ideas. A marriage of prudence, so be it! But a marriage of prudence should also be a prudent marriage.

Though far from the time when his ardent imagination prostrated itself before a deified image, Michel knew that, if he were absolute master of his decisions, he should never have married a woman who did not correspond in some degree, if not to the ideal of former days, at least to the type which he had since created of the being from whom he would ask a relative happiness.

"My decision has been as deliberate as yours," he had said kindly to Miss Severn; "I wanted my wife to be sweet, intelligent, and have Colette love her."

Beloved by Colette Suzanne was; sweet and intelligent, Michel had some reason to believe she might be, but to attain complete sincerity he should have added: "I wished my wife to be sweet and I divine that you are self-willed, a little domestic like myself, and you love society, quiet, and you are constantly astir, very feminine in tastes and manners, and the first time I met you, you were running about the woods, dressed like a boy."

"Marry! That's all very well!" Michel said to himself, "perhaps I might have married some day — but to marry a woman whom I dislike, it is too absurd!"

Perhaps he did not actually dislike Suzanne, but she certainly attracted him very little. He even criticised the girlish beauty which, for an instant, had charmed

him. Besides, he felt an inclination to detest the accent she had retained, though speaking as grammatically as a French woman, and which, when she talked, seemed as if it were actually visible on her lips.

At the Green Sepulchre, when there was no serious subject between them, Michel had been able to judge the young girl as she doubtless often appeared in daily life, and from their conversation at that time, as well as the more recent request for a pearl, a "pretty pearl," he concluded that she was ridiculously childish for a woman of twenty-two.

Charming as children are, child-women are unbearable! Michel imagined Suzanne as a second edition of Colette, a Colette with less heedlessness and less feminine charm. He loved his sister warmly, but how many times he had admired the patience and good-humour of his brother-in-law. Colette's home was Miss Severn's ideal!

Now Michel wondered how he could have answered calmly, with winning phrases, words whose memory disgusted him. It would have been so simple to cut short all hesitation with the reply, "You are right; I am only a madman. I dreamed of being loved." And Michel laughed at his own ingenuousness. To think that he could have attributed romantic ideas to so practical a person as Miss Severn! Romantic — the experienced bicyclist, the young woman in an uncouth costume wandering about the woods with a road-map!

"Oh! what a strange couple we shall be!" sighed the young man.

At the tower of Saint-Sylvère, Daran was waiting.

"Well," asked the devoted friend with unfortunate eagerness, "will you marry or not marry?"

Michel ought not to have been much surprised by the question, but through a very human inconsistency, the fact that Daran had considered possible the very improbable decision he had just made, exasperated him.

"Attend to your own affairs!" he answered angrily, crossing the room to go into the adjoining chamber, then a feeling of remorse changed his mood.

"You will lunch with me, won't you?" he asked, this time very amiably. And he added:

"I am only a fool, Daran, and a lunatic! I am going to marry."

Part Second

PART SECOND

I

MICHEL'S engagement, announced at Cannes without a word concerning the strange incident which had caused it, hastened by several days the return of Monsieur and Madame Fauvel.

Colette was radiant. In the course of the past season, during which the intimacy with May Béthune and Miss Stevens had thrown her constantly with Suzanne, she had given her enthusiastic heart wholly to the merry, frank little cousin, who chatted so prettily with her, played with Nysette, made the fourth at Robert's game of whist, and told Georges stories. Then, right or wrong, Colette was sure that the lines of sorrow on Michel's brow which her loving sisterly kisses could not efface, would vanish in the warm light of a happy fireside. And as she was wholly incapable of caring for a question of fortune, it had seemed to her very simple to unite for life two persons between whom her affection already formed a bond. So she had not asked herself whether Michel and Suzanne would be suited to each other. Was not her big, kind Michel, when he thought it worth while to take the trouble, the most charming of men?

As for "little Zanne," she had all the desirable qualities — so bewitching, so droll, so merry, and besides so elegant in a little four-cent gown! At Cannes, everybody, including May Béthume, Robert, and the children,

were bewitched with her and lamented that tiresome Miss Stevens should selfishly appropriate her for the benefit of her rheumatism and hypochondria. Dear little Zanne! She deserved a great happiness. And now the wishes and expectations of Madame Fauvel would be miraculously realised, now the great happiness had come!

Scarcely was she out of the carriage when the young matron threw herself into Trémor's arms.

"Where is Suzanne?" she cried, always following the thought of the moment, as she planted two kisses on her brother's cheeks.

"Why, at Précroix," he answered, with imperceptible impatience.

Then he tenderly kissed Colette and little Georges, whom she held by the hand, warmly returned Robert's cordial greeting, and took up Nysette, who, wearied by the journey, was rubbing her eyes in her nurse's arms.

"How do you do, Tonti?" murmured the little girl in a sleepy tone and a comical accent on the last syllable of the name she gave her uncle. "Where is Zazanne?"

"She has gone back to America," replied Michel, laughing, yet irritated.

This young girl whose love he had not sought seemed to invade his whole life and spoil its little joys. Nysette laughed, too, then letting her head fall upon Tonti's shoulder, "Silly!" she said disrespectfully. And she fell asleep again.

But at dinner and later, in the Fauvel's drawing-room, while Robert was attending to his voluminous correspondence, questions rained afresh; he was obliged to answer, compelled to look pleased when at the name of

Suzanne Colette sounded her praises, in which Monsieur Fauvel discreetly joined.

"She is a very charming girl; Georges and Nysette worship her," the lawyer concluded, as if this testimony said everything.

Madame Fauvel was a little disappointed at hearing that Miss Severn expected to stay at Précroix until Madame Béthune's departure, that is, until the time Castelflore would reopen its doors, and very indignant on finding that Michel had not given up his journey to the North.

"Why, are you crazy?" she exclaimed. "If I were Suzanne, I would kill you!"

"Why? Suzanne knows that my plans were made several months ago — and we shall not marry before the autumn, when you return to Paris."

"Then for three months you will not see each other?"

"Two months and a half, at most. And we shall have so many months to see each other afterward."

Madame Fauvel opened her beautiful hazel eyes very wide.

"How queer you are," she said. "And yet — she pleases you?"

"Oh! certainly," returned the young man. "We are beginning to know each other very well, now that we have dined together three times and had a game of croquet. She has a good appetite, and plays capitally. On the whole, it is a very charming doll."

"Oh! Michel, doll!" repeated Madame Fauvel.

And Robert remarked, "I think you are very harsh. Why the deuce do you marry her?"

"To please Colette!" sighed Trémor.

He was about to add something to his reply concerning Suzanne, for he was in a very bad temper that morning, when Nysette, climbing into the armchair, perched upon his knees. He kissed her and while the little girl returned his kisses with sweet caresses, light touches of rosy fingers, and gay laughter, he said:

"If I could have stolen Nysette from you, my dear friends, I believe I should never have married."

Then he sat down near his brother-in-law, who almost immediately commenced a discussion that had nothing to do with Suzanne.

Colette had not heard the suggestion of stealing Nysette; her love for her children was the only heroic feeling in her little bird-soul. Daran had not exaggerated; for them she would have made any sacrifice. Robert took the second place. Madame Fauvel loved her husband, loved him very much, but somewhat like a daughter, yet with the air of a princess in allowing herself to be petted, adorned, worshipped by this grave man, who had never sought to make the beautiful idol his real companion and support.

Tall, slender, graceful, pretty, too, with brown eyes which were sometimes like her brother's, and thick, reddish brown hair, naturally kind and agreeable, sufficiently intelligent to talk upon a variety of subjects with charming vivacity, artistic enough to dress with a style that dressmakers cannot sell, Colette was one of those women to whom people are grateful for being beautiful and smiling, without asking more.

In a fit of ill temper, increased by Madame Fauvel's tri-

umphant enthusiasm, Michel had taken pleasure in affecting a sort of disdain in speaking of Suzanne, which greatly exaggerated his real feeling.

Miss Severn was intelligent, more intelligent than Colette, and far better educated. She had read a great deal, history and science, travels, very little poetry, and few novels. She played and sang as well as the average person, could caricature people with a stroke of the pencil, danced as naturally as others walk, rode horseback with equal ease, and could modestly declare herself a first class tennis player.

Every evening, according to a standing order, a wonderful white bouquet came from Paris for Miss Severn, but bored by his character of engaged lover, Trémor pleaded the business which must be done before his departure as an excuse for the infrequency of his visits. Besides, Suzanne simplified matters by the natural, friendly tone she instantly assumed, treating Michel far more like her cousin than her future husband.

Delighted to spend the summer at Castelflore, and to be no longer either secretary or governess, she did not trouble herself at all about the departure for Norway. She had declared that she thought it extremely vexatious, and even absurd to defer — unless for some serious obstacle — journeys that had been planned for a long time. It was foolishly risking the chance of ever making them.

No one asked what she meant by a " serious obstacle," and Trémor wondered whether Miss Severn, indulgent to the journey, might not be making a little fun of the traveller, but the young girl's face was very calm; no

laugh, banished from the lips, sparkled in her eyes. An odd little thing, certainly.

Vexed at being compelled to marry, persuaded that his wife would make life difficult and disagreeable for him, Michel had yet admitted to himself that he would have rather enjoyed talking with Suzanne, if the thought of the bond uniting him to her had not poisoned the charm of their conversations. Yes, she was amusing! But amusing women do not always entertain, and do not entertain everybody! In any case there is one person whom they never amuse, and that is their husband.

Michel spent in Paris the week following the Fauvels' arrival; several matters to settle, letters to write, reading to finish, preparations for the journey absorbed nearly all his time.

Now that the date of his departure was approaching, Michel felt in the mood for concessions. Everything was ready. Far from Paris and Rivailler, he could once more cast behind him the cares of real life. Two months of change, two months of liberty! The future vanished in mist. Yes, everything was ready for departure.

II

THE evening before his departure, Michel dined at Castelflore, where Monsieur and Madame Fauvel had just settled, joyously welcoming Suzanne, whom Madame Béthune's absence had at last released.

The architect who built Castelflore had had the Trianons in his mind, and Colette had furnished it in harmony with the period. The park with its groves, its shady willows and oaks, from whose green shadow, here and there shimmered the whiteness of statues, descended in a gentle slope to the Serpentine, a small stream which washed its shores. And it was a paradise of flowers.

Suzanne was instantly captivated by Castelflore; she was artlessly happy in seeing around her only cheerful faces and beautiful things.

For the first time that year, Colette had had the coffee served on the terrace. It was a beautiful evening, an hour of peace, but Michel enjoyed neither the quiet nor the happiness. Leaning against the stone balustrade, he heard only the murmur of conversation between Suzanne and Fauvel, of which a word occasionally reached him, as he gazed mournfully into the distant shadows of the park. At last, he roused himself from this morbid reverie and approached the group.

"May I take a cigarette?" he asked, drawing out his case.

As Colette answered with a smile, he glanced at Miss

Severn. "The smoke will not annoy you?" he persisted mechanically.

"A cigarette annoy me! Please pass me one!"

"You smoke!" exclaimed Michel, instantly recalled to reality, and both amused and vexed by the discovery.

"I smoked with Uncle John — very often! And I like to smoke; it is 'exciting.' A cigarette, please."

"Very well," replied Trémor, and after handing his case to the young girl, he went back to lean on the balustrade.

"Thank you, Michel, thank you," repeated Miss Severn.

She had already lighted the cigarette. "What fun it is to live!" she hummed. "I am happy, happy, happy! I want nothing more in the world. This Turkish tobacco is delicious!"

Monsieur Fauvel, who had said nothing, laughed heartily.

"It is your last day, my dear," he said; "make the most of it. When Michel is gone, you won't have the right to be happy and amuse yourself in this way."

"Why?" she answered quietly. "Is he going to Norway to be bored?"

"Well said!" cried Colette.

Michel turned.

"I *wish* you to enjoy yourself," he remarked.

"Thank you."

"At any rate we will do everything possible to entertain her," said the young matron, affectionately.

"Ah! we haven't yet reached the right moment at Rivailler; wait for the season, Susy; wait for the season," said Monsieur Fauvel.

"Are there pleasant people here then?"

"Charming people! Ask Michel," replied the lawyer, thinking of the attacks of shyness to which his brother-in-law always gave himself up as soon as he reached Saint-Sylvère.

Suzanne instantly sprang up, threw away her half-smoked cigarette, and leaned on the balustrade beside her cousin.

"Michel," she said, "don't be sulky; tell me the charming people at Rivailler."

"Their name is legion," replied Trémor through a spirit of contradiction.

"That is a little vague — give me details."

"Gladly," replied Michel, with the same obliging manner. "There are the Pontmaurys, a father and five sons."

"Five sons, oh! dear me!"

"That interests you," replied the young man, somewhat sarcastically. "The three youngest are children; so only the two others count with you, don't they?"

"Certainly," answered Susy, a little tone of defiance in her voice.

"Léon is twenty-eight," said Michel; "he is a lawyer, a steady-going fellow."

"With a distant manner, whiskers, and set speeches! I can see him now! Go on!"

"Thank you very much, Suzanne," cried Monsieur Fauvel.

"You have no whiskers, in the first place, and then you are charming, which you know just as well as I do. And the other?"

"The other? Gaston," Michel went on patiently, "is twenty-five; his principal occupation, I believe, is devouring his mother's fortune."

"That's very bad! Next?"

"Next are Monsieur Landry, a retired notary, and his daughter, Madame de Lorge, who writes her name in two words, since she has been a widow."

"I have been told some tales about her, Michel," interrupted Monsieur Fauvel.

"Oh! so have I," replied Michel laughing.

"Tell me," cried Suzanne eagerly.

Michel did not laugh; the question shocked him.

"I have forgotten them," he answered coldly.

"So much the worse; I'll ask Robert. Is Madame de Lorge pretty?"

"That's a matter of taste. Smart, but smart in rather bad style; that is all!"

"Ah — and then, who else?"

"My friend Jacques Réault, who has just been married, for whom I have rented the des Saules villa."

"Is Madame Réault pretty?"

"Charming."

"Blonde?"

"Brunette."

"Ah! — And then?"

"Madame Réault's sister, Mademoiselle Chazé, a very sweet child, Paul Réault, Jacques' brother, a —"

"A very sweet fellow. Oh! I know him," said Suzanne calmly.

Michel looked surprised.

"You know him?"

"He was at Cannes last winter. We played tennis — he is — a little wild?"

"Very wild," continued Trémor, who had regained his calmness. "He graduated from the School of Science and Art two years ago, and finished his military service last autumn, but I strongly suspect he is following Gaston Pontmaury's example. Jacques is in despair over his brother's recklessness."

"Pshaw! Young men must have their fun! And who else?"

"You are insatiable; I know no more."

Michel had reached the end of his patience. Still resting his elbows on the balustrade, he bent his head till his forehead touched his open palms, and remained silent.

"I'm sorry for your memory!" cried Colette. "And Languille! The artist you know, little Zanne. And the Sainvals! Delightful people, who always have a houseful of guests. And Raymond Desplans, their cousin, a friend of Michel — lastly, Susy, I'll spare you the sub-prefect, the various officials, and many others!"

"Ah, well, well, there are enough for my happiness!" said Suzanne merrily.

She turned smiling toward Michel, asking:

"You will not be too jealous, if these people pay me a little attention?"

"Jealous, I! Good Heavens, no," he answered, angrily throwing the match which had just gone out down on the gravel walk.

"You are not very polite, my dear cousin."

"Why?" he said in a more conciliatory tone. "I think that jealousy is offensive. I trust you, that is all."

She laughed rather hardly, murmured, "Frailty, thy name is woman," and with her pretty gliding step, went back to Colette.

"I see," she added aloud, "that Rivailler is a little Capua."

After a moment they returned to the drawing-room and, at half past ten, Michel rose to take leave. He embraced Colette, who for several minutes had been talking in a somewhat tremulous voice, then he held out his hand to Suzanne.

"I hope you will give me the pleasure of answering the letters I shall write," he said politely.

"Why, of course. Good-bye, and a pleasant journey, Michel."

"Kiss her; this is absurd!" said Colette, with a laugh which showed that tears were close at hand.

Suzanne quietly offered her cheek, and Michel pressed his lips to it. His heart was a little heavy, not because he was going to leave his young fiancée, but because she parted from him so coldly. Suddenly turning to Colette again, he kissed her repeatedly, clasping her closely to his breast.

"More and more! She smokes, and I am almost certain she flirts," he thought, quickly descending the steps of Castelflore. "I certainly do not like her."

When Miss Severn put out her candle, a throng of ideas whirled through her brain.

"Ah! how comfortable I am! What an ideal cham-

ber, so cool and pink! I love pink rooms. I would like to have one with Louis XVI furniture. If only Michel will spoil me a little, give me pretty things. I think he has a great deal of taste! Shall we be happy? Oh! Michel is a good fellow on the whole, but he can't be accused of caring too much for his fiancée. Madame Béthune said, 'He worships you!' so often that I began to be afraid he might love me too much. It would be absurd to expect a woman to be passionately in love with the man she marries, but it is necessary for a husband to admire his wife a little. Robert admires Colette tremendously, yet I don't believe that Colette was ever crazy about him."

Then her thought took a different course.

"Michel spoke of a great deception which left traces upon his life. I should like to know the name of the deception, and if she was very beautiful.— Better looking than I. I wonder if he thinks me pretty? The parting did not trouble him much — nor me either. He is very glad to go; I can understand that. Such a pleasant journey. When he comes back in the fall, we shall be married. How strange! It is comical and yet alarming."

The young girl frowned. For a moment she was absorbed in a vague fear of the new life, then as her lashes drooped, she murmured:

"He will be kind, I am sure he will be kind to me."

And very peacefully, thinking of the pleasures Colette had promised, she fell asleep.

What she had said of her quiet youth was true. She had nursed her grandmother and uncle with infinite

tenderness and, while they lived, found pleasure in the duties that kept her at home, contenting herself, by way of amusements, with "five o'clock teas," "dances," games of tennis, and rides on the bicycle or on horseback with young people of her own age. But she had known sorrow, then work and servitude, then everything suddenly brightened. Suzanne had discovered relatives; she would soon have her own home. How, after having felt so sad, could she have failed to give herself up to the natural reaction?

In this Michel had seen correctly, and in other respects he could hardly be reproached for having carried on his study of his pretty cousin's character somewhat in the dark.

But what he had not known how to fathom was that some day, in this soul of a child, a woman's might awaken; within this undeveloped being a whole world of thoughts and feelings might exist, waiting to reveal themselves — like the vital principles of a seed whose unfolding was dependent upon certain atmospheric conditions — a favourable environment. Was life perhaps already dimly stirring beneath the sleeping water?

III

THE boat for Bergen on which Michel had taken passage did not leave Havre until the next morning. The young man went to Trouville, dined there, and visited a shop for antiques where he had purchased, piece by piece, most of the wonders of Norman furniture in the tower of Saint-Sylvère, but this evening he bought nothing.

Slowly descending the winding streets between rows of old houses, the voice of the sea, at first low, gradually increased in volume, until it absorbed all the noises of the street.

The shore was dark, and so, too, was the row of shops bordering the promenade where, two months later, every evening, so many well-known figures would glide to and fro.

The stretch of sand sloped gently to the line of waves and, though the tide was high, the beach, stripped of its bath-houses, tents, and parasols, looked empty and deserted.

Michel reached the pier, and leaned idly on the railing.

Here and there a phosphorescent light shimmered, but on this moonless night the sea was clearly visible only beneath the lighthouse, which shone like a gem, forming a luminous circle on the water whose heaving circumference melted into the distance. Gradually Michel gave to the waves certain definite forms, fabulous dragons, reptiles that turned and writhed incessantly.

And in the sound of the waves mingled voices that hissed or wailed by turns.

Other voices blended with the sea, too; sweeter and more human voices, that bade farewell and sang of bygone days. The waves are great tellers of old tales.

Suddenly he felt the magnetic attraction of a look and, turning his head, met a pair of eyes he knew. A woman's figure was leaning on the railing near him.

"So you are not in Norway?" came a murmur.

Conquering his surprise, and perhaps his emotion, Michel had already bowed to Comtesse Wronska.

"I am going to-morrow," he answered gently.

Faustine had reached Trouville the night before with some friends who wanted to find a villa for July and, that evening, saying she wished to send a telegram, she had escaped from the hotel. While explaining these things as if apologising for being there, Trémor, in spite of himself, looked at her in the ray of light which, through a slight change of attitude, now shone upon her face. Under her little straw hat, she seemed younger and more like the Faustine of former days.

Why did she thus give the reason of her coming? Trémor had supposed himself very far away from her at the moment she was breathing at his side when, by stretching out his arm he could have touched her dress.

"You go to-morrow?" the comtesse repeated.

"Yes, Madame," he answered laconically.

"Isn't it a very strange thing?" she went on slowly. "I am here by accident at a time few come. You were at Havre to sail, and the same chance led you to spend an evening at Trouville . . ."

She paused, hesitated then, as by an instinctive movement Michel turned his face toward her, she was silent and he did not ask what words had been on her lips. A powerful emotion seized him. For an instant he almost abandoned himself to the madness of imagining that he had been asleep all these years and just waked from an evil dream. Comtesse Wronska? Who was she? Beside him beat the pure heart of Faustine Morel. Were there any others in the world except themselves? They did not know. They were alone beneath the sky and before the sea.

"Michel —"

It was scarcely a breath, but the name evoked the memories of bygone days.

"Michel, I have not told you. Just now I saw you go down toward the shore. My mother was with me; she knew that I wanted, that I *must* speak to you."

Without replying, Michel looked at the young widow.

"Michel," she went on, "you have not yet forgiven me; I cannot bear your unkindness."

Then he remembered that this woman, whose presence was so sweet to him, had tortured his heart, and wrath seized him.

"Do you think it was easy to bear the suffering you caused me?"

She answered timidly:

"Michel, I was very young — and I had suffered. Oh! if you knew the joyless, hopeless life of a poor girl, who has but one fate — to work for her living . . . or rather to escape from dying."

"Did I offer you this poverty?"

Comtesse Wronska's strange smile hovered around her lips.

"You offered me an income of sixty or eighty thousand francs, and Comte Wronski fifteen times as much! The prospect intoxicated me. I was mad. I thought that money could buy everything, even happiness. I soon found that I was deceived — irrevocably."

She talked for a long time of the emptiness of the life which at first had dazzled her, how she had often even regretted her former poverty.

Michel did not interrupt her; he was listening to her musical voice without trying to take in the meaning of the words. Yet he felt a mournful pleasure in listening to the deceitful melody.

After a moment, however, he made a gesture of weariness.

"Why stir these ashes? One word is enough. You did not love me."

"Listen, Michel; you are the only man I ever loved — but I did not know, I did not understand —"

"And I placed you so high," he murmured without answering directly. "My whole life would have been devoted to deserving you. You were the most beautiful, the purest, the best of women; I worshipped you on my knees."

Comtesse Wronska shook her head.

"You worshipped me," she said, "but did you love me? No, you loved a woman who had my features; you loved in me a conception of your own mind. Ah! why do they say that love is blind? On the contrary, true love is terribly clear-sighted! It sees defects of charac-

ter more clearly than friendship or indifference could do; but it loves in spite of these imperfections, almost on account of them, because it loves a human being and not an abstraction. You never loved in this way. Then, when you perceived your error, love vanished! It was the angel, the ideal, the fairy that you loved — and I believe you scorn the woman, that is all!"

She was silent, and the waves sung still more loudly in Michel's ears. Fishing boats were returning with the tide, their white sails glided through the circle of light to vanish in the shadow and appear again nearer port. Trémor, his face hidden in his hands, did not seem to have heard the comtesse. There was silence; at last she asked:

"Is what I have been told true? Are you going to marry?"

"It is true," he replied, without raising his head.

"To an American?"

"To my cousin, Miss Severn-Jackson."

"Ah! I did not know you had an American cousin," replied the young widow with a tinge of derision. "I congratulate you. The advantage is great."

He looked at her almost sternly.

"If you allude to pecuniary advantage, the charge is groundless. Miss Severn has no fortune."

Faustine lowered her eyes.

"Then," she said, dropping the aggressive tone she had assumed for an instant and speaking with great sadness, "it is she at last, the angel, the fairy? And you love her passionately?"

Michel turned so abruptly that the comtesse started.

"She is like any other young girl," he said, "and I do not love her. I am marrying because I have grown to hate solitude, and would like to have a family; because I am tired of traveling and would like to settle down in some place; because I have wasted my life and wish at least to try to re-establish it upon a new foundation; that is all. Oh! do you suppose that angels and fairies can still exist for me?"

Wrath had again seized Michel, more nervous, more intense. As Faustine listened in silence, he suddenly grasped her hands and, in a low voice, whose passionate vibrations he could not control, said:

"But you have never understood how I loved you! Ah! how my whole being belonged to you to dispose of by a glance, a word, a breath; how jealous, despairing I sometimes was, and with what good reason. And I was born to love thus madly, exclusively, passionately, but also sacredly, and for my whole life. Then you killed love in my heart, or so degraded it that I love no longer, shall never love."

A stifled cry of entreaty or love:

"Michel!"

And Faustine's pale face, from which the hat fell back, was pressed against Michel's breast, her beautiful hair touched the young man's lips. He yielded to the charm, his arms clasped her shoulders, his lips rested with delight on the tawny perfumed locks that sought his caresses. Then he saw the snare; very gently, with a sort of indulgent, sorrowful respect, he thrust Faustine away, and for a moment they remained side by side without daring to speak, their eyes upon the sea.

At last Faustine murmured:

"You no longer love me. . . ."

With the same sad gentleness, he answered, "No."

The memory of poor little Zanne had not even glided over his mind, but he knew that he could not give Comtesse Wronska the love of Faustine's fiancé.

Comtesse Wronska passed her hand across her forehead, then with a woman's instinctive movement, arranged her hair and hat.

"Farewell," she said.

"Farewell," murmured Michel.

He would have liked to add that he wished her happiness, that he would remain her friend, but the words failed; he faltered something, and the light figure vanished in the darkness. Michel might have imagined he had had a dream, if he had not still felt upon his lips the silken caress of the golden hair, and through his whole being the emotion aroused by that instant's embrace. It was the end of the romance and he would fain have detained Faustine, perhaps to curse her, but also to see and hear her, taste the bitter pleasure of all that could no longer be, regrets for the happiness she had not desired to bestow — when there was time.

A verse of a beloved poet, the poet of hours of deep sadness, came to his memory:

"From me you have desired to know,
Whence comes my love for you. In sooth,
I love you for this reason. Lo!
You bear the semblance of my youth!"

Michel no longer loved Faustine, but she resembled his youth. And when she vanished in the darkness, it was to his youth that he believed he was bidding farewell.

The next day — once more — he left France.

IV

BEFORE the train stopped Michel had leaned out of the door to receive the welcome of Colette's smile, and having sought in vain upon the almost deserted platform her pretty slender figure, he had experienced one of those keen, yet somewhat foolish disappointments, to which sensitive natures are prone, and which seem so absurdly disproportionate when calmly compared with their cause.

Behind the station, in the shade of a large chestnut tree, the Castelflore carriage was waiting; but Michel's unexpected telegram had passed Monsieur and Madame Fauvel on their way to Paris to spend the day and evening. Miss Severn had given the necessary orders. These details, which he learned from the coachman, did not dispel Michel's annoyance.

The wooded road which united the station of Rivailler with the tower of Saint-Sylvère reminded him of more than one unpleasant hour; often at the end of a somewhat tiresome day he had rolled over it, weary of distant journeys. Then Colette would want to carry him on to Castelflore, but the gay life there held little attraction for Michel in these days of moral fatigue. Resisting her affectionate entreaties, he always ended by returning to "the dove-cote of Saint-Sylvère," which, though dull and empty by contrast, at least required from its occupant neither a white cravat, nor gossip.

To-day, alas! it had not been necessary to defend himself and invent excuses to escape the coaxing invita-

tions of Madame Fauvel. It was a queer idea to leave the country in the month of July to seek the white asphalt! And Suzanne? Why had she remained at Castelflore? No doubt she had been afraid of missing a garden party at the Sainvals, a five o'clock tea at the Pontmaurys, or one of the walks in parties which she had often described in her letters to Michel, letters to which certain foreign turns of phrase gave a special attraction, and which often by an amusing word, the unexpected and whimsical summing up of a situation, had brought a smile to the lips of the man who received them. Nor were they devoid of heart, for they often spoke of Colette and the two children with real affection. But they were the letters of a frivolous child. Not a serious reflection, not an allusion to the future.

The dry earth rang under the horses' hoofs, great clouds of dust rose for an instant, then gradually settled down again through air too still to bear them away. The blue sky descended to the horizon, where in the opaline distance the green of the fields of oats blended with the yellow hue of the wheat.

The tower of Saint-Sylvère rose at a turn of the road, and the carriage soon stopped at the gate. While the servants were taking the luggage, Trémor went into the garden. The flowering vines seemed to have interlaced to protect the fairy slumber of the " Sleeping Beauty "; the traveller thought that this abundance of vegetation, though he loved it, gave a neglected appearance to his dwelling.

He went up the walk whose leafy trees permitted only a pale, emerald green light to reach the earth. Then,

at a sudden turn he saw, framed in the grey stone, starred with clematis, Suzanne waiting for him with Georges and Nysette. Their little arms were wound around Miss Severn's waist, two curly heads rested against the folds of her gown, and she herself was smiling brilliantly as if she were a part of everything expanding around her in the summer sunshine. By a strange reaction it seemed to Michel the most natural thing in the world to find her here to welcome him amid the flowers.

"Oh! you are really kind," he murmured, warmly pressing Miss Severn's hands.

In the study Suzanne told him various little items. She had given up going to Paris to attend a luncheon for young girls at the Réaults. Then she had thought of receiving her cousin in the tower of Saint-Sylvère with the children. Antoinette — the old nurse who had brought up Michel and Colette — had wished to come with them.

"It seems that this would be more the proper thing," added the young girl.

Michel looked around him; all the Rouen vases were full of roses, on the desk oats and large field daisies rose from a green bronze jar. Suzanne answered the glance.

"*We* robbed the garden. Oh! how pretty this virgin forest is! You are not vexed, Michel, because we have profaned the sanctuary?"

"On the contrary, I am very glad of it, and very grateful."

He left the room to give some orders. Downstairs Antoinette was drinking a cup of milk with Jacotte.

"You will have a charming wife, Monsieur Michel," she said. "Everybody loves her."

Michel's only answer was a smile. When he returned, Suzanne was examining the tapestries.

"Your dove-cote is delightful," she said.

"A little dismal, however."

"There are no dismal houses, Michel; there are dismal people, that is all."

Michel took Nysette in his arms and went from room to room, explaining to Suzanne the origin of the ancient furniture.

"You won't be afraid to live in this old house?" he asked, amused at seeing Miss Severn, so young and modern, sitting in a window seat, playing with a spinning-wheel.

"Three months a year? Not at all. And Castelflore is so near."

"Susy will always stay at Castelflore," said Nysette.

Georges, who understood better, smiled scornfully.

"Goose," he said; "Uncle won't let her."

The inspection of the tower of Saint-Sylvère continued. On the lower floor was a large unfurnished hall. Michel, annoyed by Suzanne's allusion to the vicinity of Castelflore, made an effort to say pleasantly:

"You can arrange this room according to your taste, if — if you wish to entertain a little."

"I was thinking of that," replied the young girl with the utmost composure. "But I should like to have antique furniture here similar to the rest, and in my room too. It is impossible to introduce gewgaws! It's

quite enough to put in myself. Dear me, what an anachronism!"

This pleased Michel, and when they went back to the study the understanding was complete.

"Suppose we should dine with you!" suggested Suzanne, as six o'clock struck.

A message was sent to Castelflore, and with an air of playing at housekeeping, the young girl took her seat opposite to Michel. The children laughed and talked, delighted with the festivity.

Suzanne spoke of Robert and Colette, the pleasure she had had, the friends she had made.

"Are you very fond of society?" asked Michel.

"Very — though I know little of it."

"*Because* you know little of it," he emphasised.

"Not at all, the more I know of it, the better I like it."

Michel was silent, and Georges took up the conversation.

"You know I am riding horseback," he announced.

Then Nysette, with an eagerness that made her lose her breath, told an incomprehensible story about a "child horse" that was very naughty, and had eaten its papa.

Suzanne's burst of laughter charmed Michel, while Georges overwhelmed the little girl with scorn. She insisted on the truthfulness of the tale. Paul Réault had told her, and had even known the poor papa horse.

"I had thought a little of dining at the Réaults, I felt so lonely this evening," Michel remarked. "Do you see them often?" he added.

The Réaults? She was crazy about the Réaults. How charming Thérèse was! Simone Chazé was only a child, but such a darling! And Paul was an excellent fellow, and Monsieur Réault a delightful man! This enthusiastic praise put the finishing touches to Michel's good-humour.

"I am neglecting my duty," suddenly exclaimed the young girl; "I haven't enquired about your journey. There are travellers who would not forgive it."

"Oh," said the young man mournfully, "travellers like to talk of their journeys only to have the opportunity to speak of themselves."

"It isn't that — but I have had your letters. They were very interesting. I felt as if I were reading an article in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*," observed Suzanne with the composure which often left it doubtful whether she was jesting or speaking seriously.

Wondering whether the remark was intended to praise the writer, or criticise the lover, Michel bowed. She went on:

"It has not given me any great desire to visit the North Cape."

Then, still influenced by the country he had just left, Michel defended its melancholy charm, describing the marvellous light, the wonderful vegetation and, from nature, he passed to human beings.

Suzanne listened, replying just enough for Michel to know that he was being understood. Hitherto he had made his fiancée talk much more than he had talked himself.

But he soon stopped, and began to laugh.

"Come," he said, "I have fallen into the common custom of travellers, telling my adventures influenced by my imagination. Perhaps you might be surprised if you should go to Norway."

Dinner over, Michel unpacked some of the articles he had brought, wood carvings, embroideries in soft, harmonious colours, wrought by the peasant women. Suzanne flushed with pleasure when they were presented to her.

But the carriage had already been waiting several minutes. Standing before the glass, Miss Severn was adjusting her veil.

"So you were not shocked by this visit?" she asked over her shoulder. "People are so queer in France! At first I wondered all day long whether I was doing the proper thing. Then I made up my mind to be myself! Oh! I shall shock you; you will see; if not to-day, to-morrow!"

Michel protested, for he had really spent a charming evening.

The young girl had bent her head slightly to fasten her glove; suddenly she looked him full in the face.

"Michel," she said, "will you make a bargain with me? Since it is agreed that we are not romantic lovers, let us be good comrades. You will see that I can be nice when I wish; I am not stupid either — and you won't bore me; no, I don't believe that you will bore me at all. Then you will often laugh, as you have done this evening, and it will be an excellent thing for you to escape the *blue devils*. For you have *blue devils*, oh! you needn't deny it. We will walk and talk together and, as we shall not

be obliged to think only of ourselves, we can be agreeable to everybody and shall pass for charming engaged people — which will quite upset the regulation ideas. Is it agreed? "

She held out her little hand; he pressed it, smiling.

" It is agreed," he said.

The trampling of the horses' hoofs died away in the distance. Michel sat down under the trees. The quiet resolutions he had made while watching the veiled peaks of the Norwegian mountains were strengthened in his mind. He would devote himself to the happiness of this child, would try to develop in her a more intense moral and intellectual life, but he would be indulgent to her youth and gaiety.

Comrades, Suzanne had said at parting. So be it. Escaping the aberrations of love, they would see each other clearly, undazzled by any artificial light. And perhaps this comradeship might have a certain charm.

The next day at Castelflore, during a private conversation with her brother, Colette spoke of Suzanne.

" It was a nice idea to go and dine with you. Little Zanne is extraordinary! She goes hither and yon on horseback or a bicycle. Among the poor people she knew at Précroix she has adopted a mother and children whom every week, no matter what the weather may be, she goes to help. She has taken a great fancy to Thérèse Réault and almost every day she walks through the woods alone to spend an hour at the Villa des Saules; she says everything that comes into her head, and all so simply, so naturally, that everybody takes it as a matter of course. Yet, in spite of her Yankee manners, she is

French to her finger tips. A very fine copy of Aunt Régine! Ah! you have given me a lovely sister-in-law!"

"Perhaps it would be more correct to say that you will have given me a charming wife," Michel corrected, smiling. "But Suzanne and I are excellent friends. She is certainly rather gay for me, and I am somewhat domestic for her, but with some concessions on both sides, this difference in tastes will be of small importance."

"Ah! so much the better! On seeing Susy enjoying herself so openly, I have often wondered whether her high spirits might not be a source of vexation between you."

"Why? I haven't the slightest desire to be a wet blanket. And later, I confess, I shall rely upon your continuing to chaperon her in society. Come, Colette, she is a young, merry child; am I to condemn her to the owl-like existence I like to lead myself?"

"You will be an ideal husband," said Colette, clapping her hands.

Meanwhile Suzanne entered, in a riding habit.

"Aha! Something told me that the horse I saw in the courtyard was yours," she cried. "You will go with me?"

"But, Suzanne," said Colette, assuming her maternal air, "I don't know that it is proper."

The young girl folded her arms and, looking Madame Fauvel in the face, repeated:

"Proper! When Michel and I are cousins? And even engaged into the bargain? Oh, that would be absurd!"

She was so comical in her indignation, that the young man laughed.

"Come, Colette," he said, "a good idea! It really seems to me that in the country — and then Suzanne is an American. We can indulge her in one little 'Americanism' more."

Colette laughed too.

"Oh! the fact is," she concluded resignedly, "one more or less —"

V

MAY BETHUNE had reasoned:

"Suzanne is an American girl, and Michel has dropped from some little known planet. By what right should French conventionalities be imposed upon them?"

At Rivailler, people reasoned like May Béthune. Knowing the social tastes of Miss Severn and the sedentary habits of Trémor, the shyness of the latter, the perfect independence of the former, they were no more surprised to meet Miss Severn in society with Colette on days when her lover did not appear than to meet her in the woods or on the highroad, alone with him, when Colette was afraid to brave the sun. Society was not disturbed and continued to receive with open arms, not only Suzanne who was faithful to it, but Michel, when he condescended to tear himself away from Saint-Sylvère.

To account for the infrequency of his appearance, Colette's brother pleaded important work to be finished. The famous history of the Hétheens was still in an embryonic condition, but Trémor had brought it up to his last notes of travel, and this labor of recalling a recent past had bewitched him. When he had written the last word of a long chapter, the hospitality of Robert and Colette, the children's mirth and Suzanne's smiling grace rested him. Sometimes he read to the young girl what he had written in the morning, and she listened with genuine pleasure.

In society, that is at the evening parties, dinners, or morning entertainments which country life renders more simple and more free, Michel resigned himself to enter into the gaiety, and even went so far as to arrange charades. He took part in "innocent" games and, in order not to distinguish himself decidedly from other young men of the neighbourhood, he occasionally talked with Madame de Lorge, a consolable widow, who was thought amusing, apparently because she allowed outrageous things to be said to her.

With Suzanne herself, Michel perhaps exaggerated his withdrawal, lest he might become tiresome. When, recalling his privileges as her future husband when etiquette forbade him to forget them, he came to place himself at her disposal in any way, she usually greeted him with a smile whose friendliness was mingled with surprise. The smile meant: "Oh! there you are! I am very glad." This did not vex him, on the contrary, these youthful high spirits sometimes amused him. But the happiest moments of his "comradeship" with Suzanne he owed to the interviews alone with her, at which no one thought of being shocked.

Miss Severn was an excellent horsewoman; three times a week she rode with her fiancé about the environs of Rivailler, and these peaceful morning hours were to Suzanne and Michel like a truce to the pleasures of one, and the toil of the other.

Yet Trémor had difficulty in becoming accustomed to the somewhat "transatlantic" manners of the young girl.

For instance, it was hard for him to make no objection

to the lonely walks through the fields and woods. A hundred times Colette had proposed a chaperon, but the little American rebelled against all restraint of that kind. Michel was more reluctant to oppose her in this special case because he was touched by the constancy with which Suzanne weekly gave to a poor family what was better than money, a few hours of her joyous life. One day she had explained her theories about charity.

"You see, Michel, charitable institutions are not enough; they must be aided by the individual practice of an intelligent charity which would mean that each person should help a limited number —not only aid them, but devote to them a little of his time and his heart. I am not rich; I might give here and there a ten sou piece, a pair of stockings, a little gown. Instead, I have adopted the Michaud family, and give to them all the money, clothes, and time I can bestow. It is not much, poor as they are — the grandfather and granddaughter work hard to take the places of the dead father and mother — but at least I have the joy of making their burden lighter. They are glad to see me; I give them advice — yes, sir, very good advice. I scold the children when they are dirty, sometimes I wash them. Meanwhile Marcienne, the oldest girl, who is a very skilful lacemaker, works and works. It seems that the children are more obedient at school since I have looked at the reports, and the grandfather thinks the house is pleasanter since I taught Marcienne to keep the rooms tidy and put flowers in the pots. The grandfather likes to have flowers in the house."

"Yes, yes," Susy added, seeing Michel smile, "he likes

it. I am not poetical, yet I think it does no harm to mingle a little simple poesy in the lives of poor people. Yes, Michel, I know I have done those poor Michauds some good, and through it I have given myself so much pleasure."

This profession of faith enchanted Michel. The doll had a heart. But he showed himself less resigned in accepting the Americanisms of his fiancée, when he saw her one evening, after a dinner party at Castelflore, dance the skirt dance before twenty people.

This skirt dance, whose figures resembled very closely those of Loie Fuller, was one of Miss Severn's great talents. She danced it without effort, lightly, airily, as a butterfly hovers. And in her long floating mauve foulard whose width of more than twenty yards, rising with the movements of her arms, framed her like wings, she really gave the idea of a butterfly, a large pretty butterfly.

It was impossible to deny the charm of this graceful creature, impossible, too, not to admire the exquisite form which the wide silk gown enveloped so closely. Michel could not help acknowledging this charm; but he remembered that others were there; he thought he read in their eyes what he himself was feeling, and the idea was hateful, causing almost the impression of physical suffering.

A moment later, chance brought Susy near the young man, and she saw that he did not share the general enthusiasm.

"How sulky you are," she remarked gaily, still excited by her recent triumph.

Michel was staring fixedly at the floor; he raised his head.

"Listen, Susy," he said; "the dance displeased me so much that it would be very difficult to compliment you upon it."

"The *skirt dance* shocks you! But one sees scarcely anything else in every drawing-room."

"Possibly, but I confess that until now I have never seen it except at the Folies-Bergère."

Miss Severn laughed in rather a vexed way.

"Is it ugly?"

"No, it is far too pretty."

"You complain that it is too good?" she said heedlessly.

Michel looked at her and a faint smile hovered around his lips, while an expression somewhat difficult to define sparkled in his brown eyes.

"Precisely," he assented.

A flush tinged Miss Severn's face, and she shook her head like a child, laughing merrily.

"Will you do me the favor," Michel went on, very seriously this time, "not to dance it again?"

"Will you be very, very glad?"

"Extremely glad."

"And you will be very, very nice in return?"

"As nice as I can be, yes."

"Well, then, I won't dance the skirt dance any more, for the present at any rate."

Michel marvelled at this submission. He thought that patient gentleness would conquer the little eccentricities of his fiancée, and congratulated himself on his firmness.

But he did not understand — did Suzanne herself? — that all his firmness would have been vain. If Michel had triumphed, it was due to a scarcely expressed compliment, which she had apparently been able to read in the eyes of the austere knight of Saint-Sylvère.

Michel usually chose to dine at Castelflore on the few days when Colette had invited no other guests.

One evening as he entered the little drawing-room, Madame Fauvel asked with some excitement, if he had met Suzanne.

"Suzanne? Why, no; has she gone out? It is going to rain in a moment."

"She is at the Michauds, has been there I don't know how long, poor little girl! I was beginning to be anxious when little Louis came to say that his grandmother had died suddenly and Suzanne did not wish to leave his sisters and himself until the return of their grandfather. The horses are being harnessed: I hope Suzanne will not start before the carriage arrives."

"What a brave little philanthropist," cried Monsieur Fauvel.

"I think she carries philanthropy, and especially independence, a little too far," muttered Trémor.

Colette made a gesture of complete helplessness, and Trémor began to talk with Robert about other things; nevertheless, when the carriage was ready, he rose.

"I am going for her," he said.

Mère Michaud was in her last sleep on the bed where for years she had languished. The light of two candles made the line of her profile quiver against the white, flower-strewn pillow. Père Michaud and Marcienne were

kneeling in prayer beside the bed. Suzanne sat near the closed window. She looked very pale.

Michel paused with uncovered head, and silent lips, his face showing the deep emotion which is a prayer in the presence of death. Then he went to Suzanne.

"I thank you for coming," she said in a low tone. "A friend of Marcienne will watch to-night. I can go."

At the murmur of words, Père Michaud and Marcienne had risen. Both were weeping. Michel shook hands with them, saying little, but speaking very kindly. He had already promised the help which must be given to the poor before they can weep in peace.

Now he thought only of Suzanne, whose pallor alarmed him. Promptly, without her aiding him by a single movement, he wrapped her in a cloak, and drew her out of the house.

Still silent, Miss Severn leaned back in a corner of the carriage. The horses started.

"What a sad day! Colette was anxious about you."

Trémor had uttered the words without a thought of reproach. With a gesture of extreme weariness Suzanne stopped him.

"I did what I could to prevent anxiety. I sent little Louis as soon as possible. I could not leave those three children alone with their dying grandmother — I did what I could."

"Why, my dear child," cried Michel, "I am not reproaching you for anything. Only it seems to me that you have relied too much upon your strength."

She uttered a heavy sigh then, in the same low tone she had used before, she began to say that when she reached

the Michauds', the old woman, who had been ill since morning, was dying. Suzanne knew it at once. Louis was sent for the village doctor, Père Michaud, and the Curé, but the end had been speedy and terrible. Before Père Michaud's return, all was over. Marcienne at first refused to believe it. She kissed her grandmother, called to her —

The poor girl interrupted herself.

"Oh! Michel," she murmured, "if you knew! It seemed as if — I was losing my grandmother and Uncle John for the second time,— as if — I felt alone, so alone — I —"

A tearless sob shook her whole body, and turning suddenly, she hid her face against the side of the carriage.

"Susy, my poor little . . ."

With an instinctive movement Michel caught her from the corner where she was trying to stifle her grief, and pressed her closely to him. It was not a caress — at least consciously — but the compassion of the strong for the weak, the firm hand stretched to the fragile one.

Suzanne yielded to the embrace like a child. For hours she had struggled against her memories, her woman's nervousness. It was sweet to be in her turn calmed with soothing words.

The carriage rolled on. From time to time, the light from a house flashed through the windows; the rain fell steadily, mournfully.

"I was very nervous, very foolish," Suzanne at last murmured.

And, releasing herself, she passed her hand over her forehead and eyes.

"You are better?" asked Michel anxiously.

"Yes."

"You will promise to be sensible this evening, not to think too much of things that give you pain, to try to tell yourself that, though nothing can restore those whom you have lost, you have new relatives who love you, watch over you, wish you to be happy?"

"Yes."

He gazed at her intently in the dusk, trying to divine the expression of her face. The carriage stopped.

As both were crossing the vestibule, Suzanne said:

"I have not thanked you, Michel. And you have been a real friend to me — kind, so kind!"

He stopped, and taking Suzanne's hand as he had done in the carriage, held it clasped in his and, smiling faintly, gazed at his fiancée with a somewhat strange look.

"It is you who are divinely kind," he replied.

VI

"*PRAY*, Mademoiselle, keep quiet a moment, just one moment. It wearies you to pose? I understand that, you are so vivacious! Oh! deuce take it; it is the expression of the eyes that it is so impossible to catch!"

"Come, drink your coffee, Languille!" cried Trémor in a tone of impatience.

"You are very ungrateful, Michel," said Susy reproachfully. "Is it your place to reproach Monsieur Languille for his eagerness to finish my portrait?"

"I am not reproaching him for anything, but I want him to drink his coffee while it is hot. They are leaving the table."

They really were leaving the table, but Languille was just in the mood to work. Suzanne was posing, her hair ruffled, her eyes sparkling, her lips quivering as if a laugh or a song had just left them. Her fair complexion, her grey linen gown, the roses in her hand, the soft green of the climbing vines on the trellised piazza, harmonised with the exquisite delicacy of all the tones.

For several minutes Miss Severn remained scrupulously motionless, then she thought she had done enough.

"I am stifling, Monsieur Languille," she said, moving in her willow chair.

"Take a moment's rest," said the artist.

In Paris and Rivailler Languille was a constant visitor at the Fauvel home. Colette and Michel had always known this friend of their uncle.

Fifty-five years of age, not tall, and somewhat ungainly, Languille by no means realised the conventional romantic type of the artist. Very social, he liked society in general, but he preferred to everything else the companionship of women, young or old, but gracious, intelligent, and distinguished. Ah! how fervently he admired these charming friends, finding, as if by instinct, compliments older than himself, which made them laugh and yet flattered them.

Suzanne seemed exquisite to Languille. On seeing her, he recalled the words of Shakespeare's Beatrice: "When I was born a star danced in the sky!"

"She is youth, gaiety, purity itself," he said to Colette. "The presence of this Miss Spring refreshes and brightens me!"

So he asked permission to give his friend Trémor the portrait of this Miss Spring.

"Oh! how sulky you look!" said the young girl, passing in front of Michel, who was turning over some illustrated papers.

She went into the smoking room, took some coffee, and appeared again on the threshold holding a bottle.

"I am going to offer you, from my white hand, a little Chartreuse, Mr. Artist; you have deserved it, haven't you?" she said, with her droll little accent.

"If the favor of being served by you *can* be deserved, Mademoiselle," replied Languille, who had just set down his empty cup.

Michel had entered the smoking room too.

"Come and smoke a cigar, Languille," he cried.

"My dear friend, the cigar will make me ill."

"A cigarette, then?"

"No, thank you, I no longer smoke. And then, these curls still lack lightness — and I don't need the subject just this moment," replied the painter, obstinately returning to his water colours.

"But you have plenty of time."

"Come, Michel, let poor Languille alone," said the laughing voice of Colette. "I mean he shall do as he likes, idle or work, smoke or despise cigars at his pleasure. He is at home at Castelflore."

"Thank you, dear Madame; thank you!"

He had already taken up his brushes again. Now he addressed Suzanne, while Michel sat down in the smoking room near the door.

"Good Michel, always attentive to his old friend! Pose again one moment more, please, Mademoiselle. I said yesterday to Monsieur Lancry, speaking of you, 'What a charming couple! How delightful it is to find engaged people tenderly united, people who love each other.' A little more profile, I beg you."

"May I look? Oh! how pretty it is, much prettier than I, Monsieur Languille!"

"Oh, Mademoiselle, what heresy!"

"Well, I will be good."

"Thank you; capital! A sunbeam on your hair! A little to the left, there! — You take long rides with Michel?"

"On horseback, yes, very often."

"It is charming. Rivailler has some exquisite spots! And Michel so thoroughly understands the simple nature of the country."

"Does Michel love simple nature so much?"

"As an artist, Mademoiselle, and the artist is interested in a thousand things the ordinary observer does not even notice. A blade of grass, a sunbeam, and his whole being thrills! Don't move your hand, for Heaven's sake! Oh! Mademoiselle, what a mingled delight and martyrdom it is to paint you! What a delight to attain the ideal merely by reproducing reality, but what a martyrdom to find this reality as impossible to render as the ideal."

"You are really absurd over this portrait, my dear friend!" said Michel's voice, vainly trying to assume a jesting tone.

"Michel is right, Languille," chimed in Monsieur Fauvel very cordially; "don't desert us all for Susy!"

"Wait, my friends, wait. Just one moment," answered Languille.

"Michel," called Suzanne, "come and admire."

Michel obeyed, and though with a somewhat bad grace, addressed a few compliments to the artist.

The clock struck half past two.

"The Pontmaurys and the Réaults are coming to play croquet and tennis," exclaimed Suzanne.

Languille started.

"The Pontmaurys! Madame Réault! So soon! I did not know it! I must go and wash my hands," he cried. "Mademoiselle, I thank you for your patience."

Taking Suzanne's hand, he raised it to his lips.

"You are angelic," he added, as he went away.

When he had gone Michel, with folded arms, planted himself in front of Suzanne.

"How many times have you heard the story of the blade of grass and the sunbeam, how many times?" he asked with a sort of violence.

"Why, this is the first time."

"The first time!"

"Certainly, the first time! Poor, poor dear Languille, you treated him roughly. It is too bad. And I love him very much."

"I love him just as much as you do. But we'll see, when you have heard the blade of grass and the sunbeam fifty times! Besides, he has a way of talking to women and young girls which I always disliked."

"Languille?"

"Yes, Languille. These eternal madrigals. And that way of kissing your hand! Was it proper? However, it amuses you, let us say no more about it."

Suzanne burst into a peal of laughter.

"Could you be jealous of Languille?" she cried. "Of Languille, you! Oh! if it were again of —"

"Of whom, if you please?" interrupted Trémor, this time exasperated.

The young girl looked at him with surprise. She knew from what she had heard and even already in other ways, Michel's fits of ill-humour, but this outburst in regard to Languille bewildered her.

"I don't know," she answered; "never mind whom, but — oh! poor man, he thought us so united!"

"I presume it is no affair of his whether we are united or not."

The Pontmaurys' automobile rolled noisily into the courtyard. Miss Severn rose.

"It is the first time we have quarrelled," she said with dignity. "I thought you were more courteous."

Susy had no leisure to devote to reflection; Madame Réault arrived shortly after the Pontmaurys, and she took her friends at once to the water colour.

"It is pretty, isn't it? He has made my mouth too large, but it is pretty."

"It is charming, Suzanne, a little masterpiece. What a delicate artist this Languille is!"

Suzanne let herself drop on the bamboo sofa, laughing crazily.

"Thérèse, my dear Thérèse, Michel is jealous of Languille!"

"Of Languille," repeated Madame Réault, laughing too.

Miss Severn gaily related what had occurred.

"Still, Michel is really angry," she concluded, with a less triumphant manner. "He was wrong, so I shall make no advances and, as he certainly will not, it will be comical."

Madame Réault fixed her velvety eyes on the young girl.

"May I be very frank in my friendship for you, Susy?"

"Oh! yes."

"Well then, don't try to establish your share of the wrong, and Monsieur Trémor's. Just slip your hand into your fiancé's and say: 'I think you were a little unjust but, without intending it, I caused you pain, and I cannot bear the idea.' You'll see that he will no longer be angry."

"Yet —" the young girl began.

Colette, Languille, and the Pontmaurys, then Monsieur Fauvel and Michel came out on the piazza, and farther confidential conversation became impossible.

"I thought you were going back to Saint-Sylvère," said Suzanne as Michel also turned toward the croquet grounds.

"I have changed my mind," he answered drily.

In the course of the game, as Languille forgot his turn then, confused by Michel's censure, missed an arch, Gaston de Pontmaury commented on the young man's ill-humour.

"The best friends quarrel at croquet," answered Suzanne.

Did Michel really feel resentment against the innocent Languille. Susy, not at all sulky herself, detested it in others, and that evening when Michel dined at Castelflore, the idea which had amused her roused her vexation. Let Languille annoy Michel, that was allowable, but that Michel should vent his irritation upon Suzanne was abominable! Conclusion: Why had not this tiresome Languille stayed at home?

The young girl thought sorrowfully of the gay, happy month which had followed her fiancé's return from Norway. She remembered Michel's affectionate kindness the day of poor Mère Michaud's death, and the new feeling of absolute confidence which had softened her grief. Then, almost instantly, everything changed. Day by day Michel became more sullen — and also more inclined to society. He now rarely shunned the receptions at Castelflore, but the more he went into society the

less he appeared to like it. It was easy to see that if certain persons as, for instance, Jacques Réault and his wife, found favor in his eyes, other intimate members of the Castelflore circle had inspired a sort of antipathy. He had taken a dislike to Paul Réault, never missed an opportunity of contradicting poor Raymond Desplans, and could not endure Languille.

The merest trifle irritated Michel. The little "Americanisms" he had formerly overlooked were condemned as unseemly eccentricities. And never an affectionate glance, never a compliment, never a pleasant word. What Michel wanted was a very quiet, very reserved little wife, a comrade, a friend, yes; but a friend who lived and breathed for him alone. Michel's promised wife was pretty, and gay and attractive, and she *would* make herself beautiful, and she *would* laugh, and she *would* be admired! What harm was there in that!

To be angry about Languille!

"We must, we must make peace," Suzanne repeated to herself, the more unwilling to let the sun set upon Trémor's wrath because the young man was to leave the next morning for a three days' absence.

"But how are we to be reconciled? How?" she continued to herself.

Poor kind Thérèse! How little she knew Michel.

Yet after dinner when Trémor, as usual, went out on the terrace to smoke, she joined him, leaning near him on the balustrade.

"What am I to do?" she thought. And she again remembered Thérèse's advice. It would have been easy to follow. Michel was standing with one hand rest-

ing on the stone; there was nothing more simple than to do as Thérèse had said. For an instant Susy was tempted to risk it.

She laid her hand within a few inches of the young man's. Oh! dear, they seemed made to clasp each other. And after all, it would not be the first time that the little one found itself enclosed in the large one. . . . Suzanne again hesitated, but the courage she longed for would not come. No, she must try some other way. So she bravely made the first commonplace remark that crossed her mind.

"Michel," she said, "can I read Theuriet's novel?"

"Which one, my dear? Theuriet has written a great many," answered Michel drily.

"The last one," replied the young girl pleasantly.

"Well?"

"I asked you if I could read it; Colette reproaches me for not keeping up with anything."

"I don't know; I have not read it."

Michel had begun to smoke again; at the end of a few minutes Suzanne continued:

"You know that Pépa is sick?"

"Your mare? Yes, I saw her myself to-day, but it will be nothing serious."

Another somewhat lengthy silence.

"Michel, I think Madame Réault perfectly lovely; the more I know her, the better I like her."

"Ah! so much the better."

"We shall see a great deal of them in Paris, shall we not, when — when we are married?"

"Who?"

"The Réaults."

"If you wish."

Time was advancing, but not Suzanne's affairs. Michel was soon to leave. The young girl vaguely felt that something, some bond would be broken between her future husband and herself, if they separated in this way.

"Michel," she said suddenly, "how unjust you were to poor Languille at croquet!"

"He is crazy to play and doesn't know how to hold a mallet," replied the young man, as if to win games of croquet had been the most important interest in his life.

"I did not tell you, but we needed an eighth person."

"A fine reason! I could have played two balls."

"Come, Michel," said the young girl gently, "confess that you do not care so much about croquet as all that, and that you were in a bad humour."

Michel flung his cigarette away impatiently.

"Suzanne, we have already quarrelled once on account of this — of Languille. I grant that I had a rather foolish touch of anger, but you misconstrued my words."

"Very well, let us not discuss the matter. Only I should not wish to have any cloud between us for so trivial a cause, Michel."

"Susy, what vexed me was your saying that I was jealous. Jealous, I, of Languille! Besides, I am not of a jealous disposition," he added calmly, almost believing it for the moment.

"Well, everything is forgotten, isn't it? We are friends?"

"Friends, Susy."

He took and pressed the hand she extended, so the conversation ended as it should have begun, but it was not at all the same thing, and Susy felt it.

Michel's reflections, as he walked back to the tower of Saint-Sylvère, were anything but optimistic. The evening he saw his fiancée beside the death bed of a poor woman, his own heart had seemed very narrow beside this child's, so widely open to human sympathy. But the next day the young girl who had thanked him so sweetly in the vestibule of Castelflore had danced the "skirt dance," was passionately fond of pretty gowns and waltzing, and would never have married a man without a fortune.

To understand her better Michel had desired to see Suzanne in society. Now he was fully convinced. Miss Severn was only a coquette, an infernal little coquette, intoxicated with delight at her own charms. Michel abhorred coquettes, and had unconsciously allowed Susy to perceive something of this feeling. He had astonished and vexed the young girl — and had she not imagined that he was jealous! Jealous of Languille, the little fool!

Meanwhile, Michel was walking toward Saint-Sylvère, weary of Suzanne, and terribly weary of himself. And he regretted his quarrel with Miss Severn and, above all, the peace of last year.

What did it matter if Suzanne was a flirt? Had he not suspected it even at the time of their affectionate comradeship? Was not Colette a coquette, too? Had he, like other men, chosen his life-companion? No, a stupid fatality had forced her upon him.

So he would let Suzanne do as she pleased. As for worrying over a little brainless fool, trying to reform her education or her character — never!

And after having long pursued this circle of ideas, Michel, believing himself wiser, went to Paris and spent three days there.

VII

DURING these three days, drives, visits, dinners followed so closely that Susy had little time for thought.

The morning of the fourth one, Colette decided to invite the Réaults to dine that evening. Suzanne took charge of the matter, and refusing any escort, as usual, set off seated on the high cushion of her little carriage, driving the ponies herself.

When Miss Severn opened the door of the Réault drawing-room, her eyes sparkled like stars under her big hat lined with white tulle.

"From what pretty picture painted at the beginning of the century have you descended, Mademoiselle?" asked Jacques Réault gaily.

"Flatterer!"

She held out her hand to Jacques with a smile, then she saw Raymond Desplans, Madame Sainval's cousin, and there was another clasp of hands and another smile.

"How is Thérèse?" Suzanne asked. "No, thank you, I won't sit down, I am going upstairs. But first learn the cause of my morning call: Monsieur and Madame Fauvel beg Monsieur and Madame Réault, Mademoiselle Chazé, and Monsieur Paul Réault to do them the honour of dining at Castelflore this evening."

Jacques hesitated.

"Your invitation is terribly tempting, Mademoiselle, yet I fear we must give up the pleasure."

"Why?"

"We dined at Chesnaie Friday, at Castelflore Saturday, with the Rièges Sunday, and Monday we had the pleasure of receiving our friends here. Now this is Tuesday."

"People go to the country to rest," observed Desplans philosophically.

"At least they have that praiseworthy intention," Monsieur Réault replied, "and that is why I think it would not be very sensible for Thérèse and Simone to go out again this evening. Alas! my responsibilities as head of the family compel me to be very frank."

"Far too much so, sir, but I will see Thérèse and, if she refuses, I will quarrel with you."

As Miss Severn went toward the door, she glanced toward Raymond Desplans.

"We have received Madame Sainval's invitation; what a delightful idea, this green and mauve ball!"

"Mauve for the young married women, pale green for the young girls, green and mauve for the room decorations, green and mauve for the German."

"Oh! there will be a German!" said Suzanne, turning back.

"A delightful German, Mademoiselle; I can speak of it with more certainty because I am to have the pleasant task of leading it with my cousin Marguerite."

"Dear me, what fun it must be to lead a German!" cried Suzanne, so earnestly that both men began to laugh.

"Oh, Mademoiselle," said Desplans, "if I could only have chosen my partner! But since that could not be,

will you do me the honour of giving me your first waltz?"

"Willingly."

Then, shaking her finger at Monsieur Réault, who rushed forward to attend her to Thérèse's room:

"Stay, stay, I know the way," she said; "I want to talk with Thèrése alone!"

But Madame Réault made almost the same reply as her husband.

"Four days in succession — and we have led this life for two months. It is terrible, my dear."

"Colette will scold me, I warn you."

"Has anyone ever been able to scold you?"

"Of course there are people who scold me; think of Michel."

"Oh! I don't believe that!"

"You are wrong. Michel can be very cross. You saw that with Languille. Michel is whimsical. For instance, he can say nothing good of his friend Desplans."

"Oh! Suzanne, frankly, the only thing that surprises me is that Monsieur Desplans could ever have been a friend of Monsieur Trémor. He is a nonentity!"

"Nonentity?" said the young girl. "Oh! he isn't a genius, but he is droll; he amuses me."

"Suzanne, confess that he admires you a great deal, and tells you so a little?"

"Perhaps so! What of it? There are people more clever than Desplans who torment me."

"Could you be a little — coquettish, Susy?"

Miss Severn lowered her long lashes and looking through them, sighed: "It is entertaining."

"And if that is the reason Monsieur Trémor does not like Monsieur Desplans?"

"Doesn't like! Likes him *no longer*, my dear! Pshaw! I won't be rude to please Michel. Ah! if I should turn my back on people who annoy me! Madame de Lorge, for instance."

"She is insignificant."

"Say affected, impertinent, ill-bred. And she thinks herself pretty, and she paints, and she wears wigs. I don't understand how Colette can receive that woman. Well, Michel thinks her witty."

"I don't quite see, as far as her wit is concerned, how her wigs . . . ."

"Yes, yes; oh! she sets me on edge."

Susy bit her lips and fidgeted with the handle of her parasol.

"But Thérèse, my dear, I didn't come to talk about that horrible Madame de Lorge; I must have you to-night."

The young girl redoubled her entreaties, but Thérèse always answered gently:

"Jacques said this, Jacques prefers that."

"Then you obey your Jacques blindly," cried Miss Severn at last, her arguments exhausted.

"Blindly, oh! that depends. . . . Only, I never like to vex him."

"You are wrong to spoil him so."

When Suzanne found herself on the way back to

Castelflore, her mind went over the visit with an irritation she would have found it difficult to analyse.

"Monsieur Rèault is absurd. And Thérèse agreeing with him! Who knows. Perhaps she is charmed to spend an evening alone with her Jacques."

Evidently vexed, Miss Severn dealt rather a sharp blow of the whip on the shining flanks of her ponies.

"Desplans is very nice," the roving mind went on, "whatever Thérèse says. A little affected? Pshaw! Who could throw the first stone at him nowadays? It is true he thinks me pretty. So do many others. I let myself be admired. Thérèse calls it coquetry. It's all very well for Thérèse to talk. I am sure Jacques pays her more compliments all by himself than Desplans, Pontmaury, and the others give me. Could Michel be jealous of them all? Are people jealous when they do not love? And Michel does not love me. Oh! no! I don't love him either — but I am not jealous."

The ponies trotted with difficulty, checked by the ruts of the grass-grown road. Suzanne drew them up into a walk.

"It is strange," the young girl's thoughts went on. "Thérèse is constantly obliged to economise, to deny herself one thing or another, and yet I have never seen a happier face."

The little horses seemed so tired that Suzanne stopped them, but at a rustling of the leaves the ponies pricked up their ears.

"Mademoiselle, I'll wager you took me for Robin Hood."

At these words gaily flung into the silence, Miss

Severn turned and saw Paul Réault, holding a pencil and a sheet of paper. Bits of moss clung to his light clothes.

He was a tall, dark young fellow, who had already committed many extravagances, but they had not corrupted the loyal heart that beat in Paul Réault's breast. Neither shy nor foppish, neither humble nor vain, he was not ignorant of his good qualities, and knew his faults.

At Cannes, charmed by the fresh beauty of the little American and somewhat encouraged by her independent manners, he had at once paid court to her; then one day Susy had laughed at him and they had since been the best of friends. When Paul met Miss Severn at Rivailler, and heard of her engagement, he had sincerely congratulated her.

"Well," cried the young girl, amused at this apparition. "One would think you had been rolling in the hay-mow. Dear me! Have you just descended from Parnassus?"

"Alas, Mademoiselle, no folly need surprise you on my part."

"You are in love?"

"Exactly, Mademoiselle, in love as I have never been in all my life."

"Poor fellow; it is lamentable! And I am sure this is at least the twentieth time, since you reached the age — of un-reason."

"Don't laugh. This time, I should be capable of dying."

"Oh! come! I should like to see it."

"Too kind. But you are wrong to jest; it is very serious."

"I confess that the symptoms are alarming. How many cantos are there in your poem?"

"It is not a poem, Mademoiselle; it is a sonnet," replied Paul with dignity. "Unfortunately, sonnets are usually composed of fourteen lines, and I have found only four. Now I have been at work since eight o'clock this morning. These four lines elaborated in two hours would tend to show that I lack aptitude."

Miss Severn laughed irreverently.

"Two hours! Why, it is nearly noon. You should say four. A line an hour! That is promising."

"Noon! Ah! Confound it," groaned Paul. "And I am to lunch at Monsieur Lancry's. Madame de Lorge will look daggers at me."

"Aha! Madame de Lorge! Then the sonnet? . . ."

"Oh! Heavens, no, Mademoiselle! But I am in a scrape."

The young man's face was so amusingly penitent that Susy fairly lost her breath in a fresh burst of laughter.

"I am going within fifty yards of Monsieur Lancry's; shall I set you down at the cross-roads?" she said, when she had partially recovered.

"Shall you? With the utmost delight! But look at me; one would think I had been sleeping in a barn."

"Nonsense! You need only roll your eyes and murmur any piece of foolishness in a sweet voice. Madame de Lorge is not exacting."

Paul shook his coat to free it from the clinging grass,

then after a slight hesitation, took his seat in the little carriage.

"Do you want me to drive?"

"No, I like to do it," she replied, touching the ponies. "Now what have you to repeat to me, young poet?"

Paul seemed to be calling up his thoughts.

"*Your eyes speak not, oh! have they naught to say, while*
Calm and tranquil, they thus meet my own?
I hear you sing, I see your . . ."

"Radiant smile, of course! Well, you see, poetry is only endurable when it is very fine . . ."

"Oh!"

"Is she blonde?"

"No."

"Brunette?"

"Yes."

"Ah! Now I've caught you. Is she a married woman in society?" she went on with perfect composure.

"Oh! Mademoiselle!" exclaimed the young man, in a comically shocked tone.

"Yes or no?"

"It is a young girl in society, Mademoiselle."

"A young girl. Then you are going to marry her?"

"Alas! They refuse to let me."

"Well, that doesn't surprise me."

"Much obliged to you."

"Is she in Rivailler?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"Tall?"

"Oh, no."

"Is it Marguerite Sainval?"

"No."

"Ah! Brunette, you said? Pretty?"

"Lovely."

"Sixteen?"

"Exactly."

"I have guessed. It is Simone."

Paul uttered a heavy sigh.

"Yes, it is Simone."

"Well, so much the better. It would be very nice if you should marry her."

"Nice? I should think it *would* be nice! But you don't know Jacques."

"What is the objection? Your pranks?" Susy went on with the same frankness.

"Principally my idleness. He thinks that if I had any regular occupation, I should not have time to commit so many follies. So I promised to work but, like Saint Thomas, he wants to see before believing. And I don't feel much encouragement. There is the story of the English girl," Paul murmured as if in spite of himself.

"What English girl?"

"One I ran away with last winter. An authorised elopement. We were to be married."

"That's a fine proceeding! What a queer idea to elope with an English girl! How did your adventure end?"

"Very simply. Penelope — her name was Penelope

— and I perceived that our characters lacked affinity. So we exchanged touching farewells, and she went back to her island. Only Jacques got wind of the affair which, unfortunately, is somewhat recent. So a month ago, when I told him of my love for his sister-in-law —"

"He sent you walking?"

"'Cain, what have you done with your English girl? . . . I will never, you understand, never, give you this poor child before you have applied to yourself the test of work . . . And if you dare to say to her one word of your feelings, you shall not set foot inside my house.' "Am I unfortunate enough, Miss Susy?" said the young man, suddenly changing his tone.

Suzanne was looking at him with genuine compassion, mingled with the interest that the most commonplace love affair always awakens in the least romantic woman.

"You will help; you will intercede for me?" Paul continued.

"With all my heart, if I can, and you are steady."

"As a statue, you'll see. This little Simone has transformed me. Ah! if I could think all day long that her smile awaited me at home, I swear that I should be capable of working, who knows — perhaps of becoming someone of distinction. I should have but one goal, one desire, one dream in the wide world: she! always she! And they will not believe me."

Suzanne listened, a little irritation still in her heart.

"These lovers are decidedly tiresome," she said to herself.

They reached the cross-roads. He descended.

"You are my good fairy, Miss Susy. Thanks to

you, Madame de Lorge will be more merciful; ah! one last request! You will not tell Michel my secrets?"

"Why?"

"Oh! Because I know Michel. He would side with Jacques. 'Work, my good fellow, or console yourself. People don't die of love, believe it!'"

VIII

"*How* crazy this Paul is, but how comical too!" thought Susy. "And she blushed when I asked if she ever thought of her future husband. Here are two more people who love each other and will be happy, like Jacques and Thérèse."

The ponies stopped.

Suzanne knew that Michel was to arrive by train the night before, but she was a little surprised to see him waiting for her in front of the entrance of Castelflore, his face decidedly sullen.

"Good morning," she said, after the instant's surprise, taking the hand Trémor offered to help her descend, and so cheerily that he did not venture at first to express his ill-humour.

In the drawing-room he made up for this restraint.

"When will you drop this habit of going out alone, which I detest?"

"I love it," she answered calmly, standing in front of the mirror to take off her pretty white hat.

"And, besides, you are late; Colette was anxious."

Susy turned, her hat in her hand.

"And you?"

"I also, of course. I have been here three-quarters of an hour."

Suzanne, without answering, went into the dining-room where Monsieur Fauvel, Colette, and the children had just taken their seats at the table.

"I ask your pardon," she said, going to her place.

"We ought to ask yours," replied Monsieur Fauvel. "Nysette was famished. You are only ten minutes late."

"What delayed you, dear?" enquired Colette.

Suzanne laughed.

"At first I loitered a little and forgot the time, I must confess. And then I met with quite an adventure. I picked Paul Réault up on the way and took him to Madame de Lorge's, where he was to lunch."

Michel abruptly laid down his fork.

"You took Paul Réault in your carriage?"

"Of course, in my carriage."

"Oh! you think it proper for a young girl to drive under a young man's escort?"

His voice trembled with ill-repressed anger.

"It is always done in America. And a young girl's reputation is sufficiently sacred not to depend upon the observance of more or less idiotic conventions," replied Suzanne in the same tone.

"We are not in America."

"Come, a little calmness," said Monsieur Fauvel who, however, could not help laughing.

"Calmness," cried Susy, "when he —"

"Don't be vexed, my dear little cousin," the lawyer continued. "In theory, you are right, but practically, Michel is not wrong — If you will reflect for half a minute, you will agree with me."

Susy was appeased, and Michel looked out of the window with an air of resignation.

"Well, are the Réaults coming?" asked Colette.

"No. They have been out four evenings in succes-

sion, and Jacques is afraid Thérèse may be too much tired."

"That is absurd," broke in Michel, who at this time lacked all forbearance.

"Absurd!" Susy repeated, her wrath stirring again. "Absurd that a husband should think of his wife's health?"

"In this particular case, yes."

"They are turtle doves. What do you expect?" said Monsieur Fauvel.

"They have been married six months; it's time, it seems to me —"

"To stop cooing?" asked Monsieur Fauvel. "I'll wait for you to try it, my fine fellow. We'll see if you do not coo like the rest."

"I don't believe it," muttered Michel.

A wave of color swept over Susy's face, and tears of rage sprang into her eyes, but by a miracle of will she prevented their fall, and in an exaggeratedly quiet voice, said:

"Desplans was at the Réaults."

"I suppose you could not say Monsieur Desplans?" remarked Michel.

"Oh! as you please! I said Jacques just now, I believe, without shocking you."

"Yes, but that was not quite the same thing," put in Monsieur Fauvel's conciliatory voice.

"Then I saw *Monsieur* Desplans, who talked with me about the ball."

"Really!" cried Colette, supremely interested. And they began upon the mauve and green gowns.

After luncheon as Suzanne told Colette she was going down to sit on the river bank, Michel asked permission to accompany her. He seemed to have forgotten his displeasure and talked of an apartment he had visited in the Quartier Marboeuf, of an interview with his upholsterer, and a dining-room decoration.

They sat down at the foot of the slope. The Serpentine flowed at their feet; grey green willows bordered the opposite shore. Fish were swimming in the limpid water. Suzanne drew figures with the tip of her parasol on the sand. She seemed to wish to say something:

"Michel," she began at last, "do you still sometimes think of that person — that woman who caused you so much sorrow?"

Michel started, but answered quietly.

"No, I have already told you that this love had been a great madness of which I am cured."

She was silent, then said timidly, "Michel, was she very beautiful?"

Michel looked at his fiancée with a somewhat ironical smile.

"Why do you ask that question?"

"For nothing, just to know."

"If I should tell you that she was not equal to you, what would you gain by it?"

"I am sure that she was very beautiful, far more so than I," murmured Suzanne, without raising her eyes. "And — you loved her passionately, didn't you?"

"Yes, passionately," he repeated vaguely. "I should be grateful if you would forget this story, as I have myself."

After a silence, he continued, trying to smile:

"Since you allude to my past, I am inclined to question you a little about yours. You are neither romantic nor sentimental yourself, but I am certain that your engagement brought despair to a number of people."

"The two gentlemen who offered themselves to me this winter, then? I told you about them. And upon my word, I have little confidence in the persistence of their despair."

"But you had suitors in America?"

He laughed, but his watchful eyes did not jest like his voice.

"Oh, of course, flirtations and not so many as you suppose."

"And no one wanted to marry you?"

The young girl's face brightened and her laugh sounded more musical than ever.

"A New Orleans merchant. Oh! how queer he was! Neither Uncle John nor I liked him. And then, when I was eight or ten years old, I believe, I knew a very nice little boy who always wanted to be my husband, because he liked to play with my dolls."

"And this is all?"

Suzanne raised her clear eyes.

"Why, yes," she said, "as you remarked just now, I am not sentimental, and few people are in my country."

Michel frowned slightly.

"Perhaps that is a pity."

"A pity!"

"If anyone there had loved you very tenderly, per-

haps you might have been touched with compassion. Released from your promise, for your grandmother would have desired your happiness, you would have married in Philadelphia and — it would have been better."

Susy suddenly dropped her sunshade.

"Why?" she asked in a stifled tone.

"You would have been happier, I think, and —"

"And you also?"

"I did not say that," he cried quickly.

Without answering, Suzanne rose.

"The sun is coming," she said, stooping for the parasol; "I am going in."

But, much disturbed, he followed her.

"I swear that I did not mean that," he repeated. "I was thinking solely of you."

Seizing both her hands, he forced her to stop.

"Suzanne," he commanded, "I insist that you should believe me."

"I do believe you," she replied coldly. "Let me go, Michel. Colette is expecting guests; I must change my dress."

Colette's boudoir, which separated the young wife's chamber from Suzanne's, was deserted, but Susy did not seek her cousin. Her head feeling heavy, she hurriedly drew out her tortoise-shell pins, and her hair rolled over her shoulders. As she glanced into the mirror, she saw two little tears gliding down her cheeks and angrily wiped them away.

Other tears followed, and Susy's impatience increased with their number. To have red eyes when one is about to receive guests is not pleasant; Colette would ask ex-

planations. Michel would be triumphant; the maid might come in at any moment.

"Cruel, cruel, cruel," she repeated.

Someone knocked at the door.

"May I come in, Colette?"

Good Heavens! Michel's voice! Suzanne wanted to run away, then pride nailed her to her place and, having flung her little handkerchief on a table:

"Come in," she called with perfect calmness, forgetting her unbound hair.

"I thought I should find Colette," the young man explained. "I wished to say good-bye; I am going away. And then I wanted a book that was a little new."

Suzanne assumed a careless manner.

"Here is one on the table."

"Have you read it?"

"I? Oh! I read so few novels!"

Michel took a volume haphazard.

"Good evening," said the young girl; "I have only time to dress."

She had already reached the door, when Michel asked a question whose triviality almost embarrassed him.

"What are you going to wear?"

Suzanne seemed surprised.

"My mauve gown."

He hesitated, then said:

"Your eyes look a little tired — a little red, this evening."

"My eyes red! Not in the least; why should I have red eyes?"

"I don't know. I state a fact. Perhaps it was the dust; you were driving on the highroad this morning."

"No doubt! So I am ugly? It is amusing."

Michel involuntarily smiled. With her unbound hair, not very long and quite curly, framing her young face, she looked like a charming little page.

"Why, no," he replied, yet very laconically.

Then he went back again.

"Susy, I should like to explain what I said just now."

She affected great astonishment.

"Just now?"

"Yes, I don't know what you understood, but really I was thinking only of excusing my bad temper. I am captious, very quick, but I hurt you, and —"

He seemed uncomfortable or unhappy, and it must be confessed that Susy enjoyed this embarrassment or sorrow.

"You did not hurt me," she said deliberately, only in a slightly offended tone. "Besides, you asserted almost immediately that you had not intended to say anything to wound me, and I believed you. I had forgotten the trifle."

"Really?"

"Really."

"I am very glad of it," said Michel, in a tone from which one would have inferred precisely the contrary. "Good-bye, Susy."

He went away as if with regret. The sight of the poor eyes reddened by the dust had grieved him — and he had seen a little damp handkerchief on the table.

An hour after, as Colette was reading in the drawing-

room, Suzanne sat down at her feet in the attitude of a coaxing child.

"Colette," she said, "I should like to know — that woman — whom — whom Michel loved. Do you believe he still thinks of her?"

"What an idea!" cried Colette.

"Has he ever seen her again?"

"No, not for years."

"She was very beautiful, wasn't she?"

Colette made a face. She easily denied her gods.

"A matter of taste, you know. She was brilliant, yes."

"She did not love Michel. Why?"

"That is very surprising, isn't it?" answered Colette laughing.

"Oh; I don't say that at all," protested the young girl eagerly, "but since he loved her so much —"

"She was not worthy of him, that is all."

"Colette," said Suzanne again, resting her head on her cousin's lap, "do you think I am worthy of him?"

This time Madame Fauvel took the young girl's face between her hands and kissed her tenderly.

"Little goose! Should I have desired your marriage, if you were not worthy of him?"

"I should like to know that woman's name, Colette."

At first Colette absolutely refused to talk about that old story and that detestable person, then she yielded, named the detestable person, and told the old story in full.

"I saw the beautiful comtesse at Cannes this spring, without talking with her, of course."

Susy seemed to be following an idea. "Then they have been engaged?"

A question was burning on her lips: "Was Michel very demonstrative to his fiancée?" but she dared not ask it.

"They have been engaged," replied Colette, laughing, "but don't be too jealous — you know, they were engaged in the French fashion."

Susy smiled in spite of herself, then another thought suddenly came:

"She was a widow, when — in the month of April, and Michel knew it?"

"Certainly, he knew it," cried Colette looking at Suzanne more closely. "What absurd fancies are you going to get into your head? If Michel thought you were tormenting yourself with such childishness —"

The young girl started up. "Colette, promise me that you will not tell Michel I asked these questions. It would trouble me, you see —"

Her eyes were full of tears.

"You are nervous to-day, my darling," said Colette in astonishment. "Don't worry; I'll say nothing to Michel. Only, you would be very wrong to think of your little quarrel at luncheon; I am sure he already regrets his reproaches. You mustn't be vexed with him."

"I am not vexed," said Susy, but without great positiveness. And she passionately embraced her cousin. Her heart was lighter.

For four or five days Michel did not appear at Castelflore. When Colette sent for news of him, he replied

that he was working steadily to finish his notes of travel that week. But Monsieur Fauvel announced his intention of going to Saint-Sylvère himself, and asked Suzanne to accompany him.

Michel seemed a little embarrassed at the sight of his unexpected visitors, though the table loaded with papers at which he sat forbade any accusation of having pleaded his work as an excuse.

In reality he had tried to tear himself from the life of vexations which for some time had unnerved him. He could allege with truth the severe headaches from which he had suffered for several days.

"After all, I believe the Réaults are right," he concluded; "these evening entertainments are bad for the health."

"A question of habit," Suzanne declared; "it doesn't fatigue me at all."

"Yet you are a little pale," remarked Trémor.

She shook her head quickly, with a movement familiar to him, which might mean anything one chose.

"You are not ill?"

"No, indeed, and I am having a very good time."

"How long is this exciting life to last?" asked Monsieur Fauvel.

"Until the end of the week, at least."

"Are you going to the Sainval ball?" cried Suzanne.

"Probably; I can't very well avoid it."

Yet Michel performed the duties of hospitality. He took Miss Severn and Monsieur Fauvel into the ground-floor room where were the pieces of Norman furniture which he intended for his wife's chamber and little draw-

ing-room; then Jacotte served luncheon under the trees, and Suzanne did the honours.

The young girl thought she again saw the pleasant comrade whom she had mourned, and it was this same pleasant comrade who appeared at Castelflore the following week. Until the evening of the ball, Michel avoided even his best friends, but he rode on horseback with his fiancée, discussed the apartment and its furnishings, and gave Marcienne Michaud six hens.

Suzanne told herself from morning till night that she was perfectly content with her fate; by dint of repeating she ended by believing it.

IX

THE maid had tied the last ribbon, put in the last pin, and Susy looked at herself more carefully in the long mirror.

"I *am* pretty," she thought.

In the satin gown which sheathed her closely, she looked extraordinarily slender, but taller and more womanly. The pale green and silvery stuff emphasised her fairness; her pretty rounded shoulders, her arms dimpled at the elbows like those of a child, were white as snow and fresh as flowers.

She could not help smiling at her image.

"I am pretty," she repeated. "Why is there only one person who never seems to notice it?"

"You are always very pretty, Susy," said Madame Fauvel, "but this evening, you are positively adorable. It isn't allowable to be so bewitching."

"I am sure that in fifteen minutes it will be proved that somebody can be still more so," Suzanne retorted gaily, glancing at her cousin, whose wonderful hair was being waved by a maid. "As to my gown, it is a gem, and you spoil me too much, dear Colette."

"Michel is waiting down stairs; go ask him what he thinks of pale green costumes."

When Suzanne appeared on the threshold of the lighted drawing-room, Trémor could not repress a movement of surprise. Lightly crossing the room, she stopped before him, radiant, yet a little timid.

"Here I am, Michel," she said coquettishly.

She had often thought that the black dress suit made her fiancé look taller; to-night she fancied the white cravat gave his face a more severe expression.

Susy's frankly expectant attitude asked a question.

"You have a pretty gown," remarked the young man.

For an instant, Suzanne felt that all her pleasure had vanished. A pretty gown! She knew very well that she had a pretty gown; that was the business of Colette's dressmaker. There was a different remark to be made, and even if Michel desired to keep to this mere approval of her costume, there was another way of expressing it.

Trémor was still looking at the "pretty gown" and Miss Severn waited; at last, unable to endure the silence longer, she said:

"Neither Colette nor Robert are ready yet."

"It is not late," replied Michel.

Then they were silent. While she unfolded a paper, he shut one of the windows and stood there gazing out into the darkness. But he still saw the shining vision, the satin gown with its fairy-like sheen of water.

It was really the little cousin of the evening before who was coquettishly asking admiration for her new costume, but at the first glance Michel believed he divined in her the attractive mystery of a new personality. He recalled the metamorphoses of the fairy tales when the humble visitor says:

"You thought you were receiving a beggar; I am a fairy; beware!"

It seemed as if the magic transformation had taken place in Susy, that the triumph of her smile said:

"You thought you were scolding a child; beware, I am a woman!"

Michel had unconsciously foreseen this exquisite creature on the evening when Susy had appeared so graceful in her mauve gown. Wonder blended with bitterness, joy in admiring Suzanne; wrath in thinking that others would see and admire her too.

Leaving the window, he went toward his fiancée, who, a little consoled by the remembrance of Colette's compliments, a little excited by the anticipation of the ball, began to talk.

"You know this is my first ball, Michel," she said. "Uncle John and I seldom went into society. And this is my first low-necked gown. Completely low-necked, you understand?"

"Completely low-necked; yes, I understand," repeated Michel, dwelling very slightly on the adjective.

The utterly unjust reproof concealed in the reply was scarcely perceptible. Yet Susy felt it, and instinctively drew up the tulle scarf that covered her shoulders. The movement angered Trémor.

"Do you intend to keep that scarf on at Chesnaie?"

She smiled, still very pink.

"Why, no."

"Are you cold?"

She hesitated and at last said: "A little."

Michel looked at her an instant.

"I should like to know how you will dare to wear before two or three hundred persons a dress which confuses you now."

He felt that he was brutal, and yet could not hold back

the words. But Susy was struck by the logic of the remark, and answered, thinking — as soon as the sentence was uttered — that the reply was meaningless:

"It is because you make me feel more nervous than the others, I suppose."

"Ah! I make you nervous? I am always a privileged person."

His voice was hard, sharp; his eyes were wrathful.

Suzanne, too, was angry. Rising quickly, she stood before her lover.

"Listen, Michel," she said, "if you must be as sulky as this, and spoil all my pleasure, say so! Under these conditions, I would prefer anything; I would rather give up the Sainval ball."

She paused, then added: "You are unbearable, you see; I am sure you do not know how unbearable you are."

Her arms hung by her side as she raised her large sparkling eyes to Michel. A subtle perfume emanated from her gown, the flowers on her breast, her very slightly powdered hair. And her wrath was pretty for, angry as she tried to look, there was nothing hard in her face, nothing sharp in her musical voice, whose foreign accent was more marked at this moment.

Then — perhaps for the first time — Michel had a wild desire to take her in his arms, to feel the perfumed hair beneath his lips, to hold close to his heart this lovely child who, after all, was his promised wife, and to say!

"Well, yes, don't go to this ball, I beseech you; I don't know by what right I ask this sacrifice. Yet I entreat

you with all my soul, by all the suffering I foresee and fear."

But Susy read nothing of these thoughts in the glance that rested on her an instant and, having also reflected, she went on quickly:

"After all, I should be very foolish to deprive myself of going to the ball on your account."

"I should be in despair myself to have you resign such a pleasure," he said coldly.

Just at that instant Colette entered, charming in her mauve moiré gown, painted with pale orchids, followed by her husband. Casting a maternal glance at Suzanne, she cried: "Well, brother mine, are you proud of your fiancée?"

"Very proud," returned Michel, without the least enthusiasm.

At Chesnaie, however, he seemed to be in a pleasanter mood, and asked the young girl to give him her first waltz.

Miss Severn was at first surprised, and then sincerely annoyed.

"Oh! Michel, how sorry I am; I did not know you danced; you have never done so this summer. So I gave my first waltz to Raymond Desplans the other day."

"Ah!" said the young man simply.

Without adding anything, he offered his arm to Suzanne and followed Robert and Colette, who were greeting Monsieur and Madame Sainval.

On entering, Miss Severn almost uttered an exclamation. This drawing-room appeared as glistening and illusive as an apotheosis of fairyland. Borne on the in-

visible music, in a dazzling light which lent strange splendor to the sumptuous mauve orchids and green chrysanthemums in the baskets, the light silk draperies and immense awning of the decoration, mauve gowns and green gowns were whirling in all directions. The different shades blended in harmonious contrasts. Through the large bay windows the trees in the park were vaguely outlined, mysteriously illumined by the green and violet tints of an illusive twilight.

Madame Sainval smiled at Suzanne's ingenuous admiration, and Trémor was again compelled to receive with a good grace a compliment to his fiancée which made a mischievous look sparkle in the young girl's eyes.

Colette and her cousin sat down near Madame Réault and, almost immediately, Raymond Desplans came to claim the waltz which was being played.

Suzanne hesitated only an instant.

"Monsieur Desplans," she said, "I am going to be rude; but when I gave you this waltz, I thought that Michel would not come, and as he has asked me for it, I should be very grateful if you would give it back to me."

"That is perfectly right, Mademoiselle," replied the young man, bowing.

She thanked him prettily, held out her book for Desplans to write his name for another waltz, and then went in search of Michel, whom she found leaning against the frame of a door.

"I have taken back my waltz," she said, laying her gloved hand on Trémor's arm, as the orchestra again began to play.

"I beg you to notice that I have not asked you to do this, Suzanne."

"I know it; I acted of my own impulse."

"Do you want to dance with me?"

"If you wish it yourself, of course," she replied, a little disappointed by this doubtful welcome.

"Oh, it was ridiculous for me to invite you. I'm not fond of dancing. Really I don't know what inspired the idea, and —"

While he was speaking in this constrained tone, Miss Severn was smiling at him with a caressing glance.

"Don't be cross, Michel," she said very gently.

Then, without answering, he passed his arm around the young girl and bore her away to the melody of the Hungarian waltz.

Susy thought Michel waltzed badly; yet she was glad to dance with him. There was in the mere fact of being guided by him to the rhythm of this somewhat savage music something sweet and, and it were, normal, that cheered and comforted her.

She was the first to speak — a little remark upon the harmonious effect of the two prescribed colours, which she would have made to any partner. Michel answered, admiring what she admired.

"Do you like the mauve or the green gowns best?" she next asked.

"The green ones."

"And, come now, Michel, among the green ones, to which would you give the prize?"

Michel smiled, and Suzanne thought it made him look very young.

"To Mademoiselle Sainval's and yours."

"Really? You like my gown?"

"I thought I had already told you so."

"Oh! so badly."

"Then this is better?"

"A little. And," she continued with involuntary coquetry, "between Marguerite Sainval's gown and mine, which do you prefer?"

Michel smiled again; she waited with a little anxiety.

"Yours, I think."

"Why?"

"Because it is more simple, and perhaps — because you are fair, and the water green is becoming."

"Perhaps so, yes."

"Have you noticed that we often have the same taste?" he said amicably.

"Certainly, but not in everything, only in furniture and gowns."

"That would be very little."

"The Hétheens?" she queried with an air of anxiety that was very comical. This time he laughed outright.

"That might be better."

"In waltzing?"

"Oh, no, I waltz very badly" (he had just missed a step).

"Very badly, no," Susy corrected, with absolute frankness; "but not well. Yet I am glad to waltz with you, all the same."

"You are very kind. It is like saying, when someone steps on your foot, that you did not feel it."

"No, I *love* to dance with you. . . . Perhaps it

is because you are something to me, and the rest are nothing."

He instinctively drew her a little closer to him.

"So I really am something to you?" he murmured.

"You are my fiancé — and my cousin too," she replied smiling.

Trémor's face had darkened.

"That is true, I forgot," he said with a sort of emphasis; "I am your cousin!"

"And you," she asked, "are you glad to dance with me?"

"What a question! You know that you waltz to perfection."

The music stopped. They went into the conservatory, where Jacques Réault came to speak to Suzanne; then Michel asked for another waltz.

She drew out her little book but, at the sight of the pages filled with names, Michel smiled somewhat bitterly.

"It is useless," he said. "There is nothing more for me."

"Why, yes," she tried to say; "only —"

"No. Besides, it is better. I know it is not very pleasant to dance with me."

The orchestra began a prelude. As Gaston Pontmaury approached to remind Miss Severn of the dance she had promised him, Michel with a hasty good evening went away.

For a moment Susy thought that she should have no more pleasure during the evening, but her youth gained the upper hand.

There was much unconsciousness in Miss Severn's

coquetry. The desire to please was so instinctive, so absorbing, that she seemed to make it her object to charm women, children, and the humblest people she met, and she was as coquettish in her manner with Colette, Georges, Nysette, and the Michauds as with her partners.

Her delicate freshness, the brilliancy of her blonde beauty, were unusually attractive, she knew, and this joyous certainty of being pretty sparkled in her words and smile.

She was surrounded like a little queen and, in her joy at being thus petted, she felt very good, very indulgent. All the men seemed agreeable, all the women beautiful, and the whole world very captivating.

Once she saw with pleasure that Michel was dancing with Marguerite Sainval, for she would have wished every one to have as much enjoyment as she and, believing he would come to seek her later, she kept the German for him against all entreaties. She felt a great desire to dance with Michel again; perhaps a little from gratified pride, perhaps also from a feeling that Susy scarcely defined. But he did not come.

Several times, while dancing, she tried to smile at him, but he pretended not to see her. She cheered up again, however when, after many others, the young man came to take her to the supper room, though she felt that she and Michel were not in harmony.

Trémor refused to conduct his fiancée into the gallery, whose windows were wide open, but served her in the conservatory. For the moment they were entirely alone.

"People will think you are monopolising me," cried the young girl.

"Robert went an hour ago, leaving you and Colette in my charge. I have not the slightest desire that you should catch pneumonia."

"Poor Colette! She is having a good time herself, and probably not thinking of me; but would you believe that I haven't had time to exchange two words with her this evening?"

"Oh! I could easily believe it."

"It's dull to eat alone," said Suzanne suddenly. "Why didn't you get something for yourself?"

"Because I am not hungry."

"Here are two forks, one on my plate and one on the the foie gras; we might eat at the same time."

"I am not hungry."

"Oh! just a mouthful, Michel, one tiny mouthful, to please me," she entreated.

Half vexed, half amused, Michel took the fork and obeyed. The young girl laughed gaily.

"You are very nice, Michel," she said, "when you cease to be a serious man. Serious men are sometimes very tiresome, do you know?"

"Oh! I know it. It has been, perhaps, the great folly of my life to be serious."

His tone grieved the little queen of the evening; a look of tender pity softened her eyes and, very gently, she laid her ungloved hand upon her stern subject's.

"No," she said, "I do not think so; I think your life is very good as it is."

Trémor's hand had closed upon the compassionate fingers.

"Colette is right," he said in a very low tone, "you are a terrible coaxer."

"But you are so hard to coax that I don't see what you should fear," she murmured in a still lower voice.

Disengaging her hand, she took a few sips of champagne, then said:

"I have finished; if you are thirsty, I'll give you the rest."

"Thank you."

"Are you disgusted?" she asked so gravely that he could not help laughing.

"Why no. What a baby you are!"

Taking the goblet, he drank from it slowly.

Susy seemed delighted.

"That is a savage ceremony," she said. "In novels of adventure, the Apaches and all those folk seal their compacts of friendship in that way — not with champagne, of course. I hope we shall never quarrel again. Do you remember our agreement at Saint-Sylvère?" she added rising.

Trémor looked at her an instant without speaking, then he murmured.

"Yes, I do remember it."

When her lover had taken her back to the ballroom, Suzanne was on the point of offering him the German, but changed her mind. They separated, and she once more allowed herself to be carried far away from real life by the intoxication of dancing and adulation.

"Mademoiselle Sainval is only the official heroine of her parents' ball; the real one is Miss Severn," exclaimed

Baron Pontmaury, who was talking with Trémor. "Look at her."

Trémor submissively obeyed the request, but he certainly did not find as much pleasure in seeing Miss Severn dance as did Baron Pontmaury. Yet Suzanne, in her glory, did not forget the lovers whom she was to aid. While waiting for a waltz she had promised Paul Réault, she sat down by Simone.

"Are you having a very good time, darling?"

"Oh!"

The answer was very expressive.

"So much the better," replied Miss Severn. "Have you danced a great deal?"

"A great deal."

"With pleasant people?"

"Why yes,"

"Who, for instance?"

"Monsieur Pontmaury, Monsieur Riège, Monsieur Boisse, Monsieur Desplans, Monsieur.— Oh, I don't know; there are too many."

"Didn't you dance with Paul Réault?"

"Oh! yes."

"Then why did you omit the poor fellow from your list? Do you dislike him?"

"No."

"I'm very fond of him. And you?" asked Miss Severn suddenly.

"So so," replied the young girl, making a little face.

Paul came up to them.

"We were talking about you," said Susy, with her usual composure.

Mademoiselle Chazé blushed deeply.

"I am certain that Miss Severn was telling you something bad about me, Mademoiselle."

"Oh! not at all, were you, Suzanne?"

"So so!" retorted Suzanne, imitating her little friend. "Come, my dear, give this wicked Paul this waltz, or he will think I have been doing him an ill turn with you." She was going to add: "I am tired," but the young man did not give her time.

"Oh! Mademoiselle Simone, I entreat you!" he implored.

"I should like to, but I am engaged."

"And the next?"

"The next I have given to Monsieur Languille, but — Suzanne," asked the young girl, "would it be very rude to forget Languille — just this once?"

"Why, that would be delightful!" cried Paul enthusiastically.

When Simone had gone away on the arm of her happy partner, Paul sat down beside Suzanne, who was laughing merrily.

"I believe you are making fun of me, Miss Susy."

"Do you think so? But, you wretch, you were to dance this waltz with me. And your way of leaving me in the lurch! Oh! how funny you can be!"

"Say that I deserve the gibbet. But there are extenuating circumstances. Now, if you were good, we would dance this famous waltz and talk about her all the time."

Susy was good, and they talked about *her*. Paul found the conversation so agreeable that he asked his

good fairy to dance the German, frankly explaining that he could not dance it with Simone, lest he should displease Jacques.

"We have danced together I don't know how many times," remarked Suzanne, laughing; "people will think you are paying me attention."

"Pshaw!" replied the young man, "it's no new thing for me to pay attention to every pretty girl; Michel knows that very well."

Turning, Miss Severn sought her fiancé with her eyes. He cared little for his rights; yet Susy found it hard to give the German to another. Where was Michel? No longer in the same place, at any rate. Suddenly she almost uttered an exclamation. Michel was dancing with Madame de Lorge, and smiling at the mincing airs of "that bewigged head." Oh! that widow! Good Heavens! what had she said that he should be in such raptures? And she was painted!

"Come, Miss Susy," replied Paul, "be charitable, give me the German."

"Well, yes, then," she replied.

The German was danced at four o'clock; the ball was to end with a farandole.

Garlanded with mauve flowers and delicate green leaves — souvenirs of the German — her hair slightly disordered, her eyes very brilliant, Susy vaguely suggested the idea of a very dainty, aristocratic little Bacchante. Just as she was starting off with Languille, who had been whirling around all the evening like a young man, Michel came to tell her that the carriage was ready, and Colette wanted to go.

"Oh! Michel, one minute; this is the end."

"My dear friend," cried Languille, "you won't —"

But Trémor did not appear to hear the artist.

"Come, Susy," he repeated; "it is nearly five o'clock, almost dawn —"

"So much the better; I should like to breakfast here."

"That's it, that's it!" Languille approved pleasantly.

"That's it, that's it," replied Michel, impatiently imitating him; "it's very well for you, but I have a frightful headache."

Suzanne instantly dropped her partner's arm.

"If your head aches, let us go — I thought five minutes more — and Colette would not — but let us go."

At Castelflore Michel helped the two ladies out, then hastily embraced Colette, and held out his hand to Suzanne.

"I must run away," he said; "that luckless coachman must detest me."

"Good-bye, and thank you, brother mine," called Colette.

Alone in the pallid dawn, while the rain began to plash gently against the panes, Michel flung himself, fully dressed, upon his bed. He wanted to sleep, but all the thoughts he wished to banish thronged upon his mind, and ever whirled in a bewitching light the fragile green enchantress.

He was obliged to admit that, during that interminable night, there were moments when he would have been capable of throwing away his History of the Hétheens to dance like Paul Réault or Desplans.

"Yet I do not love her," he repeated, his face buried

in his pillow; "no, I really believe that I do not love her, but she bewitches me, she intoxicates me, as she does the rest. Ah! if the miserable little coquette, who does not consider me sufficiently 'coaxable,' if she only knew! How she would triumph, how she would laugh at me!"

X

TOWARD ten o'clock Michel rose, worn out by his insomnia.

The rain had soaked the roads; nevertheless, he went to Castelflore, thinking that he was in search of a work on ethnology. In the little room on the ground floor he found Suzanne.

She was breakfasting, comfortably seated before a table on which were various pretty pieces of silver and china. The substantial meal — bread, butter, boiled eggs and tea — was that of an active, healthy person who considered air and light insufficient nourishment.

In a closely-fitting dark wool gown, with a light blue cravat around her slender neck, her movements were as quick and her complexion as fresh as if she had been sleeping peacefully all night.

"You, Michel, already!"

He hurriedly explained the object of his visit then, while Suzanne went on eating, sat down and tried to talk. But harmony between them was less possible than ever.

Michel came very weary physically and mentally, with a vague desire to be comforted, to hear a cheering word; above all, to be understood without having to explain himself. Suzanne had fallen asleep like a child, and waked with her head filled with rose-coloured fancies. When she read novels or fairy tales whose heroine, a young, dowerless girl, or a peasant disguised as a princess, became the centre of a festival, she had smiled, giving no

more credence to the romance than to the fairy tale, but she had thought it must be a pleasant thing to have "a great success," as in the novel, or to be "queen of the ball," as the fairy tale described. And now reality had undertaken to prove the probability of fiction. She, little Zanne, had enjoyed one of those social successes perhaps once envied by her — but from so great a distance.

Miss Severn had not really been aware of her unexpected triumph until the next morning on waking. But she was still happy and content — even to the degree of scorning that poor Madame de Lorge and forgetting Michel's bad temper. Perhaps, after all, this unknown charm which emanated from her had somewhat subdued the proud knight of Saint-Sylvère. He had not been constantly cross; on the contrary, he had sometimes bestowed on Susy more affectionate looks and more indulgent words.

So, when Michel came in, his fiancée had expected to see him as gay, as agreeable, as proud of Miss Severn as she felt inclined to be of herself. She was surprised to find him so gloomy, with a frown on his forehead. He was irritated to see her so smiling.

"Are you going out?" asked the young man, noticing Suzanne's hat and cape lying on a chair near her.

She merrily answered that she and four or five other young girls were invited to lunch at Madame Réault's "to talk over the ball"; then interrupting herself:

"By the way, Michel," she said, "there is something I must ask you. Yesterday at Chesnaie, they planned a ride on horseback to Franchard. The meeting will be

at half past one, at the Butte-aux-Chèvres. As we shall not return until evening, Colette thinks it too long, and Robert doesn't care about it. Will you deign to go with me? "

A ride in a party! Michel instantly imagined what it would be. Desplans, Pontmaury, Paul Réault appeared like so many hateful spectres; he again saw Suzanne surrounded, flirting as she had done at the ball.

" Really, my dear, I have something better to do than to spend my day with a troop of people," he answered coldly.

At these words the young girl looked at Trémor and noticed his pallor.

" You look very tired. Does your head still ache? "

" Yes, of course."

They were silent.

" So," said Michel, with involuntary impatience, " you haven't yet had enough of this wretched ball. Heaven knows you talked about it sufficiently beforehand. And you must needs talk after."

Susy began to laugh. " Oh! Michel, if you only knew how exciting it was," she cried. " And after all," she went on, " you were not bored all the time, yourself. You danced."

" Twice at least, didn't I? You —"

" Oh! I did not miss a single dance. Everybody was so good to me."

" You must have talked with a great many people, for you had a court."

" Really? Well, Michel, a whole court is less compromising than a single courtier."

But Michel was in no mood for jesting.

"A fine custom young French girls have recently taken up," he said, "following the example of your countrywomen. I really don't know why they trouble themselves with a chaperon. A maid could attend them to the dressing-room."

"A time will come when they will dispense with a maid," returned Susy philosophically.

"I don't think a time could ever come when I should consider it proper for a young girl to be surrounded only by young men during an entire evening," he returned, making a more direct attack.

"Oh! surrounded by young men," said Susy, accepting the challenge and suddenly feeling a desire to tease. "Who? Let us see? Desplans? — Yes, Desplans did pay me attention. And then —"

"And Gaston Pontmaury," abruptly interrupted Michel, "and Paul Réault and Beaucourt, and then that sort of deputy, and that blockhead of a Languille."

"Oh! Michel, blockhead!" she repeated reproachfully. "Besides, Languille isn't a young man, nor the subprefect either."

"And Paul Réault, is he a young man? Paul Réault whom you knew at Cannes, who paid you attention last winter probably."

"He did pay me attention at Cannes, yes, that is true, Michel," conceded Miss Severn, still calmly pouring herself a second cup of tea, "but not here."

Michel rose, folding his arms.

"Then you admit that he paid you attention at Cannes?"

"Certainly, why not? It is droll, Michel, that you are always astonished that any one should pay me attention."

"I did not say that I was astonished — you ought not to allow it, that is all. But you are a coquette —"

"I am not a coquette; only I like to have a good time, and I do whenever I can."

"And how many times did you go for refreshments, how many times?"

"Are you reproaching me for what I ate?"

"Oh; you didn't eat much. You had very little time to eat."

Miss Severn sat erect in her chair, and looked Trémor squarely in the face.

"Did you come this morning to seek a quarrel?" she asked with a sauciness very clearly shown in the tilt of her chin.

He had not come to seek a quarrel. Oh, no! he had been captured by it; now he was in the midst, his glance stern, his voice sharp, his mind bitter, his heart contracted, all the rancour of the night on his lips.

"I have a horror of quarrels, Suzanne," he replied; "I merely wished to express my way of thinking."

"Your way of thinking is so pleasant. Do you suppose I am the only girl who laughed and talked a little at Chesnaie?"

"There are young girls, and even young married women who are very gay, charming ones who scorn the insipid compliments of the Pontmaurys and Desplans. Madame Réault, for instance, is she coquettish?"

"No, and she is lovely," Susy assented frankly. "But it isn't the same thing with Thérèse."

"Why?"

"Because."

"You cannot tell me."

"No."

"Oh, I am not curious," said the young man, whose anger was increasing. "But I confess that I did not expect such recklessness."

Susy turned pale.

"That is a rude word," she said, through her clenched teeth.

But Michel, thoroughly exasperated, continued, passing the limits which, in a cooler mood, he would have scorned to cross.

"Do you think that dances which make a young girl go from one man's arms to another's for a whole evening, are not disgusting? Do you believe that you know exactly what you are saying, under the influence of music that intoxicates you, with all these fools who are more or less excited by their visits to the sideboard? I hate these balls, I hate the license they sanction, the flirtations they favor, and as you are my promised wife —"

"Michel," interrupted Susy, trembling with rage, "take care what you are saying."

"Nothing except what is very justifiable, be sure of that. I am tired of playing a ridiculous part. I did not ask for your love, not even your friendship —"

"Michel!" cried the young girl with flashing eyes, her voice trembling from the quiver of her lips; "Michel, what you say is base. You did not ask for my friendship, but I asked for yours, and if you had given it to me, you could never, never have treated me so unjustly."

He tried to speak, but she would not permit it.

"What have I done?" she went on, with a sort of wrathful bewilderment. "Why was I taken to the ball if not to dance and have a good time? You talk of recklessness! What have I done? So it disturbs you because I am a little pleased, a little petted.— Oh! that is the way with all you men, jealous from vanity, when it is not from affection! Oh! Michel, it is unkind, it is unkind. Have I reproached you for dancing with Madame de Lorge, and yet I hate her, oh! I hate that woman."

Still more irritated, excited, carried away by the words she was speaking, she suddenly pushed the table back, buried her face in the sofa pillows and burst into tears. Michel was thunderstruck.

"Suzanne," he attempted to say, "it is absurd to weep."

But she made no answer. Shaken by sobs, tears were streaming between her fingers.

"Susy, don't cry so."

The sobs increased. It was the utter despair of a helpless, bewildered child. Michel hesitated then, distracted by this grief, he knelt before the young girl.

"Suzanne, my dear little one," he implored, vainly trying to draw away the hands she pressed against her face, "you are causing me a great deal of sorrow. If I have been too severe, if I was wrong, forgive me. My poor little Zanne, I don't want you to cry —"

"Michel," she said in a very low, suffocated tone, "you have been very cruel."

"But I am sorry for it, I assure you; don't cry."

"Michel, I am not a coquette."

"No, my darling, no — it was all those little fools that irritated me."

"And you did flirt with Madame de Lorge," she went on, still without uncovering her face.

"Madame de Lorge! Oh! if you knew how indifferent I am to her!"

"Do you think that I am not indifferent to — Desplans, for instance?"

"I hope so."

Susy raised her head, lowered her little hands and appeared bathed in tears. Then she saw Trémor kneeling before her and she smiled. It was like a ray of sunshine in her eyes and on her wet cheeks, but Michel foolishly imagined that she was mocking him, that the smile expressed a malicious triumph. He abruptly started up, and there was a moment's constraint.

"Michel," said Suzanne at last, "why did you speak to me so harshly?"

Michel sat down by her side, and took her hand.

"Listen, Susy," he said; "I am very sorry, very much ashamed of having been carried away by my anger. But your youth, your frankness, and also the customs of the country in which you were educated, prevent you from understanding the danger in these games of smiles and compliments. You are purity itself, I know, but you are perfectly aware that everybody finds you pretty, bewitching —"

"Not everybody, not you," she interrupted, pouting. And she longed to add: "If I danced the German with Paul Réault, it was because someone else, someone very

unkind, did not care to ask me." But her pride forbade this reproach.

"Not I; that is agreed — I am always the exception. But, everybody except myself, isn't that true? And it amuses you, and you encourage these flirtations which undoubtedly are perfectly innocent on your part, but, believe me, might be less so with the other side. Ah! if you knew how men talk in the smoking-rooms about women and even young girls, when they give cause for the least criticism —"

"What you are saying is very disagreeable."

"Very disagreeable, certainly, but unfortunately true. Susy," the young man continued, "I should like to ask — it is hard, it is cruel in me, but — will you promise to amuse yourself a little less another time? I should be so happy."

Miss Severn lowered her eyes, then raising them to his, said firmly:

"I will promise, but give and take. You will no longer show Madame de Lorge any attention beyond what strict civility requires. I have my vanity, too."

"I will do as you wish. I danced once with Madame de Lorge, because she came in search of me, and almost forced me to it, if you want to know.— It is perfectly absurd."

Susy laughed with delight.

"She came to search for you, Michel? Well, she is not proud."

Michel joined in her laugh.

"Then we are no longer angry with each other, Michel? I hate quarrels."

Her voice was coaxing.

"Good Heavens, so do I, I assure you —"

Michel hesitated, seemed embarrassed, then suddenly returning to the subject of the dispute:

"Susy," he said again, "I am sometimes afraid that you do not understand the importance of things. That supper you shared so prettily with me, you — you would not have shared it with any one else, Susy, tell me?"

The question was grating. Michel was not ignorant of it, but it had beset him on his return from Chesnaie and he could not help asking it.

Miss Severn looked at him in profound astonishment.

"With any one else?" she repeated, "with a stranger?"

Again she looked at him.

"Michel," she added, suddenly smiling, "would you have made the scene with which you just favored me with any one else?"

He abruptly covered his eyes with the hand he still held.

"Oh! I am crazy," he said; "I am crazy, you must forgive me, forget what I have said."

For a very brief pause they remained silent, then Susy rose.

"The carriage must be ready."

Trémor had risen too. Laying his hand upon Suzanne's head and drawing back a little to read her eyes better, he said imploringly:

"You forgive me?"

"Yes," she answered in a very low tone, without shunning the eyes that sought her own.

"Thank you, little Zanne," said Michel, gently kissing her forehead.

Blushing slightly, she took her hat and went before the mirror to put it on.

"Susy," added Trémor in a very pleasant tone, "I was cross just now; if you really wish to ride to Franchard, I will go with you gladly."

She turned quickly, with sparkling eyes.

"Oh! Michel, I should be delighted."

The young man smiled, then he took the cloth cape lying on a piece of furniture and, with gentle care, wrapped it around the pretty little figure.

"It is almost cold, this morning; take care," he advised.

The gesture, the simple words, touched Suzanne. The evening of that day, as she was going to sleep, she thought for a long time and suddenly a question formed itself in her mind:

"How do people know that they are in love? How are they perfectly sure of it?"

XI

WHILE their horses were carrying them toward the Butte-aux-Chèvres Michel and Susy's hearts were filled with the frank joy of the first days of their comradeship, but subtly pervaded by a new emotion.

Susy was enjoying the soothing charm of the beautiful morning. Michel was admiring the supple movements of a somewhat fragile figure bending beneath the boughs, and rising again so gracefully; he was enchanted by a voice that sounded as clear as the rippling of springs.

They were talking together:

"This bores you a little, Michel, because you never like rides in parties, but it doesn't bore you so very much?"

"It doesn't bore me at all."

"Do you know that you can be very kind when you choose? Why don't you wish to be always?"

Michel's only reply was a lift of the brows.

Suzanne continued:

"It seems that your solemn airs conceal a person whom I do not yet know, and who is very young, very spontaneous, happy and gay for a nothing. One of your friends told me so."

Trémor's face brightened.

"Daran," he said. "I received a letter from him a few days ago, and I am expecting him next week.

When did you see him, without counting the famous evening when his erudition put you to sleep?"

"At the time of our engagement, before his departure and yours."

"You are right, I forgot."

"He is very fond of you. Is it true that he never decides anything without consulting you?"

Michel smiled.

"I might almost believe so. In his last letter he asks me to find an engineer for his father, and to advise himself in the choice of an automobile. There's a proof of confidence! We like, Daran and I, to talk about all sorts of things that interest us, whether they are important or not. I have known him all his life, he has known me all mine. Yes, I believe he is very fond of me — and I love him like a brother."

"So much the better, Michel," said Susy. "I like Daran. I shall love him too."

Michel seemed astonished.

"I should have feared that Daran might seem to you — what shall I term it? A little disappointing. Well, he greatly admires you. Probably without intending it, you have charmed him."

She laughed a little low, sweet laugh, then in her childlike manner said:

"How many people I have charmed so! It is comical."

Michel did not think it comical, but he took care not to express his opinion. Then, suddenly, the vision again haunted him of Desplans, Paul Réault, all the young men who, like Daran, and less artlessly than he,

had yielded to the enchantment and during the ride to Franchard would be as absurdly eager as usual. He contented himself with saying:

"You know I would much prefer that fewer people should be charmed."

But Susy had not the least desire this morning to be vexed or even tease.

"Oh! Michel," she cried with a reproach in her coaxing voice, "I think you might have spared me that speech. I have been so quiet and even serious since the Sainval ball."

"For two days."

"Yesterday, especially, at Madame Riège's, I sat beside Raymond Des — Monsieur Desplans. Well, do you know what I talked about to him during the dinner? The American Constitution! He did not come back. You are satisfied I think?"

He looked at her, still smiling, admitting that after all, she was right. He had noticed that she was more reserved than usual, and that several times, by a little side glance, she had sought his approval — incorrigibly coquettish, perhaps, in this new character.

"Very well satisfied," he answered, adding, this time in a jesting tone:

"What if you should again talk about the American Constitution on this ride? Perhaps it might be a means of wearying your court."

Susy glanced at him and said firmly:

"But you would have an excellent way of wearying my court."

"Tell me quickly."

"Why, it would be to play the engaged man yourself a little more than usual, that is all; to remain near me, rush for the flowers I look at, appear to —"

Miss Severn was laughing, but there was a little tremor in her voice.

"Come," she concluded, "you know very well the manner that engaged men have, don't you? And you don't have it at all.— This is not a reproach."

"It would be a little unjust, I think. You told me one day that the regulation engaged couples bored you, and you wanted a good comrade."

She laughed again.

"That is perfectly true — but just for once, by way of a change."

Michel's heart was a little heavy. There was some truth in what Suzanne had said; yet he kept silent, still beset by the fear of being the plaything of a coquette. And he asked himself whether his own feeling was anything more than irritated pride. Had not his masculine vanity suffered more than his heart, when his fiancée laughed and enjoyed herself in his absence, when she was gracious to all, without caring to please him?

As Trémor was silent Miss Severn asked:

"For once, will you pay me attention all day long, so that others may not do it?"

"Indeed I will," replied Michel. "I only fear that the comparisons you will make may not be favourable to me."

Suzanne turned slightly toward Trémor and looking at him with the glance through the lashes which was one of her witcheries, murmured:

"If you thought so, you would not say it."

And as she held out her whip hand to Michel, he clasped and raised it to his lips. The movement was so unlike the usual manner of their relations that Suzanne began to laugh.

"My compliments, Michel; you have struck the right note."

A pause followed.

"Twenty minutes of two," cried Miss Severn, glancing at her watch. "We are abominably late." And touching Pépa's flank with the whip, she set off at a trot.

The mound known by the name of Butte-aux-Chèvres rose in the midst of an ancient wood, whose trees had been felled. A group of horsemen, amid whom were visible the figures of several women in riding costume, surrounded the landau from Chesnaie, where Madame Réault, who had not been well for several days, was seated beside Madame Sainval.

Tired of remaining still, Simone Chazé rode her horse at a trot around the clearing, then checked him to a walk to look at the heather which carpeted the earth, like dainty bells ready to sound the knell of summer.

By a skilful manœuvre, Paul joined the young girl.

"Do you want me to gather some for you?" he asked.

"No, I would rather do it myself."

"Then shall I help you from the saddle?"

"Do you think I should have time?"

"Trèmor and Miss Severn have not come; you will have plenty of time," answered Paul.

Mademoiselle Chazé slipped quickly from her saddle,

but before she was aware of his intention, the young man had caught her in his arms and placed her on the ground.

"You frightened me, Monsieur Paul," she said reproachfully.

"Oh! I beg your pardon," he implored; "are you angry? Did I hurt you?"

"You did not hurt me, but I do not like to have people rough."

She spoke gently; but her face had clouded. Paul bent his head.

"Forgive me," he repeated; "I was wrong. I have vexed, troubled you, I who would do anything to save you annoyance."

Then, as she made no reply, alarmed by her silence, he continued:

"Be kind, Simone; your heart is full of compassion for those who suffer, the sick, the poor; well, imagine that I am a poor man who needs your pity. Alas! I have nothing interesting about me; I don't beat my breast and call Heaven to witness my woes — yet I *am* unhappy, I assure you."

Simone had listened in surprise; at the last words she started.

"You are unhappy? What makes you so?"

"I cannot tell you," replied Paul; "Jacques has forbidden me."

"Is it anything bad?" questioned Simone, opening her eyes very wide.

"Anything bad, oh! don't imagine that."

He stopped, hesitated, then yielding to impulse:

"It is only that I love you, Simone, and Jacques thinks me unworthy."

"You love me."

It was a murmur, almost a sigh.

Startled, the pretty child had hidden her face with both hands, but she suddenly removed them and Paul saw that she was smiling with eyes full of tears.

"You love me," she repeated. "But that is no harm, Monsieur Paul."

"Oh! how lovely you are," cried the young man.

He longed to kneel and kiss the hands watered with such precious tears, but remembered very opportunely that he and Mademoiselle Chazé were not alone.

"Then you are willing that I should be your husband. Speak, speak quickly."

"Yes, I am willing," replied Simone gently, "but you must ask Thérèse."

"Oh! my beautiful Simonette! If you only knew how I love you, how happy we shall be."

He had forgotten Jacques's charges, and gave himself up without restraint to the happiness of being loved by this little frank angel.

Besides, no one was thinking of interrupting this love duet. They were waiting solely for Miss Severn and Michel Trémor to arrive. When they appeared at the edge of the clearing, a burst of exclamations and cheers greeted them.

"You see, Michel, we are the last," said Suzanne, excited by this noisy reception.

She gave her mare a violent blow with her whip, and dashed at full gallop across the ruts, holes, and logs,

dangerously hidden by the tall grass. Almost instantly the animal, maddened by the horse flies which had attacked it, sprang aside, and reared. It was swift as a flash of lightning. Pépa was falling. Instinctively clearing herself from the saddle, Suzanne threw herself with a sudden movement to one side. She was aware of a shock, then her senses failed.

When she recovered consciousness, she was in Madame Samval's landau, the horses were trotting. She met an anxious gaze fixed eagerly on her and saw Michel very pale, supporting her with an arm passed around her shoulders. Then she felt perfectly calm.

"It is nothing, Michel," she faltered. Then her head rested on Michel's breast, and she wearily closed her eyes.

Colette went to the sofa where Michel was sitting, and laid her hand tenderly upon her brother's shoulder.

"You need have no more anxiety, my poor Michel," she said; "the doctor has repeated to Robert what he told us. It is a miracle, but she is not hurt. The little wound on the forehead is trifling, and two or three days' rest will cure the shock to the nerves. Poor little girl! What a horrible fright she has had! And we, too," added Madame Fauvel, drawing a long breath of relief.

On seeing Suzanne pale, tottering, and apparently unconscious of what was passing around her, with a wound on the forehead which the partly dried blood made still larger and more alarming, and Michel absolutely livid, speaking in curt, broken words, Colette had felt one of the most terrible fears of her life.

The physician's visit had cheered her, but one would have said that Michel dared not share his sister's relief; while she was speaking, he seemed to listen only by an effort, his head bent, his manner dazed.

"Robert is sure that the doctor is not anxious?" he asked in an expressionless voice.

"Perfectly sure."

He went on in the same monotonous tone as if his thoughts were far away:

"I think the very thick tall grass broke the fall a little. I saw that it was a dry branch that cut her forehead."

Madame Fauvel went on talking gently, saying everything which could reassure Michel. Since taking a bath, Susy was feeling calmer and stronger. She suffered a little pain in her head, but there was no fever, no bad symptom. She had just fallen asleep.

Michel rose. "I am going," he said.

"But you will dine here?" cried the young matron astonished.

"No, I prefer to go home."

"Why, that would be absurd," Colette persisted. "Stay, you shall hear how she is, perhaps even see Susy."

"Oh! I will come back after dinner."

"But, my poor brother, you are tired, exhausted."

"I entreat you, Colette," he murmured; "I must go back."

He never knew how he found himself in his study in the tower of Saint-Sylvère. With the precision of an automaton, he had followed the familiar path. Fixed

in his brain the same thought held possession of him: "If she had been killed or seriously wounded; if when I raised her in my arms, I had no longer felt the beating of her heart, or if I had seen her crushed, terribly mutilated —"

In a moment, in a few seconds! She was blooming, full of health, talking, laughing, joyous, and all this freshness, this youth, this joy might have been only a memory. Yes, in so brief a time, all might have been ended. Under the impression of the void seen for an instant, Michel felt that for a month, the hope of making Suzanne his own had been his whole life, his sole cause for existence. And whatever he might do, however he might reason, he saw Suzanne dead, and like a mechanical refrain constantly returned the two words: "My darling, my darling —"

A tearless sob shook his broad shoulders. And yet, gradually, in spite of the anxiety which, notwithstanding the physician's soothing words, did not abandon him, a strange joy entered his heart, absorbed his whole being. For he no longer doubted, he knew well that he loved the little April Fiancée chance had given him — loved her passionately.

Part Third

PART THIRD

I

TOWARD eight o'clock, returning to Castelflore, Michel was calmer. He found in the drawing-room Monsieur Sainval, Monsieur Languille, and Robert, who repeated what Colette had already said. Almost immediately, Madame Fauvel entered and took her brother to Suzanne's room.

The young girl was very pale, with a delicate pallor that looked like ivory in contrast with the raw, bluer whiteness of the sheets and pillows; her features had gradually relaxed, and the nervous over-excitement which had alarmed Colette and old Antoinette had lessened. When Michel and his sister approached the bed, Suzanne smiled sweetly, putting out her hand a little.

The linen bandage that covered her forehead, beneath which escaped a few rebellious curls, the short, curly braid that lay on one side of her face, gave her an air of extreme youth. Trémor had sworn to control his emotion, but he was afraid to trust his voice. Without speaking, he clasped the hand Miss Severn extended in his own.

"Michel," said the young girl, "the doctor was very gallant; he told me that I was like the children who know how to fall without hurting themselves, that I was an admirable rider, that I had shown a coolness worthy

of praise, but on the whole, he was not quite certain that some good genius might not be mixed up in the affair."

Then, in the plaintive voice which possibly was rendered more languid by the unconscious coquetry of the invalid who wants to be pitied, she added:

"I was terribly frightened, my poor Michel."

Trémor convulsively pressed the hand he had not yet relinquished.

"So was I," he murmured.

"Poor brother," added Colette; "he was as pale as you."

Suzanne's eyes rested more intently on her future husband.

"Then you would have been sorry if I had died?"

He had the strength to smile.

"What a question! Would not you have been sorry if I had died?"

"Yes, I should have been very sorry."

"But, tell me," he asked, kneeling beside the bed, "you are not suffering; how do you feel?"

She shook her head slightly.

"I am not suffering; I am very tired, and my head aches a little, that is all. The doctor is right, Michel, it is a miracle; only the doctor is an old unbeliever. For my part, I thank God, Who has protected me. Oh! I am very grateful to Him. I did not have the least wish to die. You will thank Him, too, won't you?"

"Yes, little Zanne."

She still smiled, looking so pretty, so sincere, that tears rose to Michel's eyes. Stooping, he kissed the curly braid, murmuring:

"May you sleep well."

"And you, too," she answered sweetly.

Then as Trémor reached the door, she called him back.

"And Pépa, Michel, my poor Pépa?"

"She came down again quietly on her four hoofs, your horrible Pépa," he said, mentally vowing never again to trust his dearest possession to the "horrible Pépa."

The next day Suzanne remained in bed, but the following one she was allowed to sit up, on condition that for two more she would keep absolutely quiet.

On reaching Castelflore, Michel found her in the boudoir, where she was obediently lying down. She wore one of Colette's dressing gowns, almost lost in the folds of pink surah. A bluish ring still surrounded her eyes, but her colour had returned.

At the moment Michel entered, Colette was standing by the lounge, arranging some soft cushions under Suzanne's head.

"Look, sir," she cried gaily, "here is a pretty little girl playing sick in one of her mamma's gowns."

"Is it really a game?" asked Trémor affectionately.

"Almost," murmured Suzanne.

She looked extremely comfortable, her head sunk among the cushions. And Suzanne enjoyed feeling herself really beloved by Colette, Monsieur Fauvel, the friends who had hurried to Castelflore to enquire for her, above all, by this grave and sometimes rude fiancé, who had suddenly grown very gentle, almost tender.

"She is as pink as her gown," remarked the young

man, his smiling eyes wandering from Suzanne to Colette.

The young girl began to laugh happily.

"You are growing very complimentary, Michel," she said. "It is nice to be sick."

She looked at Michel and then continued:

"But it is tiresome to keep quiet to order, when one has quicksilver in one's veins. Two days, just think of it! You will be as kind as Colette, you will stay with me all day long to-day?"

"If you wish."

"And all day to-morrow?"

"All day to-morrow. I will only go to Paris with Robert in five days, when you are quite well."

He smiled. Suzanne longed to add: "To amuse me, you will pay me court — you know, as you were to do on the ride we missed," but she held back the sentence, fearing that Michel's reply might be terribly disappointing. Then, grateful to him for deferring his departure:

"Colette," she said, "compared with your brother, the Good Samaritan was a very insignificant personage."

"It is certainly a great merit to spend the day with you. I shall dispense with admiring him for it," replied Colette.

Suzanne raised her eyes to see Michel, who sat a little behind her.

"Perhaps other people might think as you do — but Michel."

The real Susy was still very much alive. It was the old glance that sought Michel, asking a denial, and

Michel, who had resolved not to flatter this ever-present coquetry, affected silence, but his fiancée's hand lay on the back of the lounge very near his face, and he could not resist the temptation of pressing his lips to it, so the young girl found the answer sufficient.

This time of captivity in the boudoir was very pleasant. While Colette, bent over her frame, was embroidering, Trémor kept his promise. It was an exquisite joy to him to spend these hours of intimacy with Suzanne, but it was also a little intoxicating. Yet Michel had not uttered one word of love. He was still haunted by the fear that Susy would have gloried in conquering the only man who had not declared himself her humble slave, and he desired that a confession from him should render her happy rather than triumphant.

Suzanne reasoned little. She allowed herself to enjoy, with a sort of indolence, this sweet and subtle happiness.

Once, not very long ago — it was the night before the ride prevented by the accident — she had asked herself: "How do people know that they are in love?" and the question was not yet answered.

A complicated work had been accomplished in Suzanne's mind. She had seen love around her, and had felt a vague desire to be the first, the only one in a manly and tender soul. She had been jealous of Michel's innocent attentions to Madame de Lorge, jealous even to weeping of the woman formerly worshipped, of the formidable shadow, which perhaps still stood between her and her future husband. She had sobbed when, the day after the ball, he had reproached her not in the name

of an affection that would have touched her, but from a sort of masculine pride which had seemed disgusting.

Then Michel was moved, he had besought her, he had knelt before his fiancée. Ah! Suzanne had really had one moment's never-to-be forgotten triumph, when she saw Michel at her feet. And since that moment she had felt with more intensity the impression which had at first amazed her, that she no longer lived in the hours of his absence. But was the feeling which thus took so many forms and insinuated itself into Suzanne's life, love?

Then there was the ride to Franchard, the accident of the Butte-aux-Chèvres. On opening her eyes, weak and crushed as she was, Suzanne had noticed Michel's pallor, met his despairing gaze, and had then felt so calm, so calm and happy in the arms which supported her.

And since?

Did Michel remember the promise made in the wood, or was his heart moved solely by the thought of the danger incurred? Susy could not determine, but one fact was undeniable: since the day at the Butte-aux-Chèvres, Michel had had "the manner of an engaged man." True, he said nothing more than a brother might have done; yet he gave her more notice, looked at her more than a brother or a "comrade," and in his eyes, his words, his silences, there was something which surprised the young girl and rendered her strangely happy.

It was infinitely sweet to see this serious face brighten when she smiled, this scornful man bow to the whims of a poor little goose in a pink gown.

Michel had proposed to read aloud to Miss Severn, and the idea had pleased her, but at the word novel, she had made a face.

"Do you like novels?" she asked.

"Yes, sometimes, as a rest, when they are well written and not wholly devoid of ideas."

"For my part, when I want ideas, as you say, I don't seek them in novels, and when I want chatter, I find enough of it in society. There remain sentimental adventures —"

"Well?"

"Well, when I think they are fictitious, they don't interest me, and if I could suppose them real, that the writer would reveal his personal life, I should condemn him too much to enjoy them."

"Why?" questioned Colette, amused.

"Because I think that when one has such memories, it is better to keep them very closely to one's self; that is all."

"Then what is to be read?" asked Michel gently. "Tell me what you are reading yourself; I will take up where you left off."

"Thierry's Merovingian History," replied Miss Severn calmly.

"Doesn't it put you to sleep?" cried Colette admiringly.

"Put me to sleep! Why, it is superb! It is a whole world resuscitated. We are in it, I tell you; we know them, see them, understand with the ideas of their period all these vanished beings. It is more romantic than any imaginable romance, if one cares for adventures, and

yet it is actual life. Those are the kind of books I love."

They could not make her change. Colette concluded that little Zanne was born to marry a historian, and Michel read the book which aroused this enthusiasm.

Certainly this time of imprisonment was pleasant, so pleasant that Susy, glad to feel still a little languor — oh! very little — did not think of going out, as the doctor had given her permission.

The fourth day Michel obtained permission to read poetry and, for more than an hour, he passed from Musset's to Sully, Prudhomme, Coppée, Verlaine, and Henri de Régnier, choosing only very refined, calm lines, yet thrilling with an intense, restrained feeling, the verse that can be read in *that best moment of love* which *is not when we have said, "I love you."*

Suzanne at first listened with a sort of smiling scepticism, then with wondering pleasure; at last she was completely charmed.

Toward four o'clock Colette was summoned to receive Monsieur Pontmaury and his son; then Michel said:

"Do you want me to read you something I love almost to suffering, whose every line seems to me to contain a fibre of my flesh? I will not read you the whole; but these verses have a powerful charm for me."

"Read them," said the young girl.

Then opening the "*Destinées*" he read several lines from the "House of the Shepherd," those in which the poet laments the past, what "will never be seen twice," where he addresses the woman he loves in caressing, lulling lines:

"Hast thou no wish, O languid traveller,
Dreaming, thy brow upon my breast to lean?
Come, from the threshold of the rolling house,
Those who have passed and those who will, are seen.
All human scenes that rise pure minds before
Will glow for thee when, fronting our own door,
The long, long, silent land doth stretch, I ween. . . ."

With drooping lashes, her head resting against the back of the armchair, Suzanne listened to this sorrowful sigh of a very noble and very proud soul, but drawn by an irresistible power, Michel's eyes left the page and suddenly sought hers. He vaguely felt that at this moment — perhaps the first — they understood each other. The silence lasted scarcely a few seconds. He dared not speak, trembling lest he was deceiving himself.

Hearing nothing more, Suzanne raised her heavy lids, met the look whose caress rested upon her, and lowered her eyes.

"No," she said, as if answering her own thoughts, "you have not the soul of a pessimist. Those who rebel against life are not the real pessimists, they are the men who expect something from it, who believe in happiness. You believe in it."

"And you?" he questioned in a very low tone.

"I believe in it, too," she murmured, "I believe in it with all my heart."

But someone rapped lightly at the door.

"Are friends being received?" asked a gentle voice.

"You, Mademoiselle, pray come in," cried Trémor,

assuming, with a praiseworthy effort, the tone of a man charmed by the surprise.

Simone slipped her brown head through the half-open doorway, then entered.

"Did you come alone, Mademoiselle?" asked Michel at the end of a moment.

"Thérèse is at home, still ill; I am with Jacques. I left him in the conservatory with Monsieur and Madame Fauvel."

"I am going to join them."

And he went out, passing Antoinette, who was bringing the tea.

II

SUZANNE, on recovering from the confusion into which Simone's unexpected arrival had thrown her, was struck by the grayish pallor of the young girl's face.

"Have you been ill, Simone?" she asked. "One would think that —"

But Simone quickly interrupted her.

"Not at all!" she cried.

Then, seizing the first pretext for changing the course of Suzanne's ideas, she motioned to the letters Antoinette had just brought in.

"Susy, don't let me keep you from reading them, I beg you," she said.

"I have plenty of time," replied Miss Severn, "I am receiving letters only from tradesmen. I had news yesterday from the Béthunes. I would rather talk."

"You are very kind," said Mademoiselle Chazé, with somewhat forced enthusiasm. "Then let me congratulate you; you look splendidly. Thérèse will be so pleased. Oh! what a fright you gave us, you naughty Susy."

The subject was fully discussed, while Suzanne served the tea and the cakes, then Simone stooped and picked up a little book which had fallen on the carpet.

"What are you reading? oh! Musset."

"Will you please put that down, Mademoiselle Simone," cried Suzanne laughing. "Musset is not for

little girls. He will do for grown-up ones — like me. And again, when the future husband permits it."

"But I know some of Musset's things, Suzanne. The *May Night, Lucie, Ninon* —"

"Dear me. I thought they were strict about your reading."

"Thérèse is a little so — but it is not Thérèse who read Musset to me," said the young girl blushing.

"Come, come, who then?" said Suzanne, amused.

But Mademoiselle Chazé's eyes filled with tears and, suddenly putting her head on Suzanne's shoulder, the poor child burst into tears.

"Oh! Susy, Susy, I am very unhappy."

"I am certainly allotted to the part of confidante," thought Susy.

She kissed Simone, then began to scold her gently.

"Come, Simone, little Simone — what grieves you so? Haven't you confidence in me?"

"Oh! yes."

"Then speak frankly instead of crying. A secret is so heavy when it is borne alone."

Simone smiled sadly.

"I am going to tell you — it is rather hard — but I — oh! it is very hard."

"Do you want me to help you? It concerns a young man —"

"Oh! Susy, how well you guess."

"This young man is the one who danced with you so often at the Chesnaie ball, the one who read to you the *May Night* and *Ninon*. It is Paul Réault."

"Yes."

"That is no reason for you to hide your eyes, Simone; he loves you very much, and you — you love him a little, don't you? This is the beginning of the story. Now I will listen."

"Oh, Suzanne, the story is so sad. The other day, you know, the day you fell, Paul told me that he — that he —"

"That he loved you?"

"Yes. And I was so happy, so happy — but — oh! Suzanne, Jacques is not willing that I should be Paul's wife. They quarrelled, Paul has gone — and — oh! I am afraid he will blow his brains out."

Cruel as it might seem, Miss Severn could not help laughing.

"No, my dear, no; in the first place poor Paul has so few brains; then people don't kill themselves when they are young, energetic, and beloved by a sweet little girl like you. Let us reason instead of crying. What does Thérèse say? Is she as savage as her Jacques?"

"Thérèse was very kind. She tried to comfort me, she calmed her husband a little, and she told me that Jacques would certainly consent to our marriage if Paul was courageous, patient, and tried to obtain a situation. But a situation isn't to be had in a hurry."

"Oh, Simone, more tears. Then the important thing is that Paul should become very sensible. Is he inclined to be?"

"Oh! yes."

"Then I have an idea; listen, darling," said Suzanne, a thought suddenly flashing through her mind. "I will speak to Michel about —"

"To Monsieur Trémor?"

"Why not? I know by chance that a friend of Michel, Monsieur Daran, whose father owns distilleries in Louisville, is looking for an engineer.— Oh! he would have to go to America. Would Paul make up his mind to that?"

"I am sure he would, Suzanne. And I would go with him," cried the young girl. "But suppose Monsieur Daran or Monsieur Trémor did not wish it?" she went on in alarm.

"Monsieur Daran will want whatever Monsieur Trémor asks of him; I am certain of that, Simone. As for Monsieur Trémor — I will try to be very eloquent. Perhaps Monsieur Trémor will wish what I ask," Suzanne continued with a sort of joyous pride. "He is very fond of your brother-in-law, and of Paul — And I hope Paul will try to be a model engineer."

"Oh! Susy, how I love you!" cried Simone, throwing her arms around Miss Severn's neck. "And we shall be happy, even in America. Paul loves me so much. And I love him. Ah! Susy, we shall have such a charming home!"

Suzanne smiled; she suddenly felt indulgent to this joy of loving at which formerly she was disposed to jest, though somewhat bitterly.

When Simone had gone she closed her eyes in a sort of rapture, asking herself what words Michel had had on his lips at the time she entered.

If he should come and say what, perhaps, he had thought just now:

"I love you, Susy; I have forgotten that beautiful

Comtesse Wronska; there is for me only one woman in the world, and that is you,— my dear little fiancée, my darling, I love you." Oh! if he should say these words, if he should say something she could not foresee which would be very strange and very sweet on his lips. She had a great longing for these decisive words, yet such a fear of them that she already heard herself saying all sorts of foolish things, to delay the moment for which her soul was yearning.

In the weariness of waiting, she suddenly saw the letters Antoinette had brought in, and absently opened the first envelope under her hand. Her glance wandered over the paper, then suddenly darted to the signature, while her cheeks paled.

"Comtesse Wronska," she said, almost aloud.

For an instant she hesitated, but only an instant. Let her who is without sin cast the first stone.

The note began:

"My friend . . ."

Suzanne read on:

"Barbizon, Friday.

"*My Friend:*

"I can call you so, can I not? There are hours when it would be so sweet to rely upon one true friendship. I shall be at Barbizon two days, and would like to see you; to ask your advice, to talk business. Can you imagine it? I, who detest business, but it must be done. I am trying to realise on the little property I possess, and I feel very lonely, very much deserted, having no one to consult except my poor mother.

"Come, I entreat you; give me a moment of your life. Oh! I know that the past, the hapless past, which awoke for one instant on the shore at Trouville, to which chance had led me, is not dead between us. But by a strange contradiction, something still draws us together; it is that neither is happy; we cannot be. You are going to marry through discouragement a young girl to whom you are indifferent, an insignificant child who will not understand you, and whom you will never love.— I have ruined my life, and shall bear the burden of my error. It is very heavy.

"I shall see you soon, my dear Michel, shall I not?

"Comtesse Wronska.

"P.S. Not knowing your address at Paris or Rivailler, I am sending my letter to Castelflore."

Suzanne had twice paused, choking, her brow covered with a cold perspiration. When she had finished, she laid the letter by her side; her hands shook with passionate rage. O! that woman! that woman! Suzanne had always feared this, always! So Michel had seen Comtesse Wronska again. He still loved her, since this creature's mere presence "awoke the past," since the woman whom he had formerly loved dared to address him as her friend, her only friend.

Through the young girl's fevered brain darted ideas which were sometimes translated into words and sentences: "Oh! cruel, cruel! He said that he would never love me, that I did not know how to understand him! — And this before even knowing me! Oh! how spiteful men are — and stupid! Perhaps this Faustine is neither

prettier nor more intelligent than I am. Oh! she is bold enough; to write in that way! 'My friend, my dear Michel!' As if he were hers, as if she had the right to say *my!* Was I mad to believe that Michel loved me? And I was going to love him, the hateful fellow, perhaps let him see it. But I don't love him, oh! no, I don't — I hate him. . . . If he thinks I am going to condescend to be jealous of his comtesse, he's mistaken; I don't care, oh! I don't care!"

In her wrath, the poor child did not attempt to consider the letter which had snatched her from her vague happiness, to give truth and possible exaggeration their due share, above all, to allot Michel his exact portion of wrongdoing. She knew that Michel had again seen Comtesse Wronska, whose mysterious influence she had always feared, that he had spoken to this woman of his poor little fiancée, spoken of her with disdain — Oh! that was worse than everything! How sure Comtesse Wronska must have felt of Michel to thus summon the man whom she had formerly betrayed, deserted, the miserable creature! — He would go to Barbizon; he would once more see the enchantress, and then — then he would forget the wrong formerly done, and poor little Zanne.

A heavy sob escaped Miss Severn's breast, but anger dried her tears, for she heard the familiar step she had just expected so joyfully, and she did not wish to have the executioner see his victim weep.

The executioner had little thought of Comtesse Wronska, to whom he had not given the slightest sign of life since their meeting at Trouville. He opened

the door eagerly, like a happy man, and entered, his eyes shining with a gentle light.

"Here I am at last," he said. "Monsieur Pontmaury has carried off Jacques and Mademoiselle Chazé in his automobile, I —"

Then he was struck by the change in Suzanne's face and, clasping her hands, asked:

"My Susy, what is the matter?"

She abruptly released herself.

"Here is a letter for you, Michel. Antoinette gave it to me, and I opened it by mistake. Take your property."

On recognising Faustine's handwriting, Michel half understood. His first impulse was to assure Suzanne that he loved only herself, his fiancée, and that no tie existed between him and that woman, but we rarely yield to the first impulse, especially when it is the good one.

"Will you explain," he said, "how it happens that you opened a letter addressed to me?"

"I have told you that it was given to me, I opened it by mistake, and — I read it because — because the first words made me wish to know the rest, that is all. But don't be uneasy; I shall not repeat the experience."

"You will be wise."

If Susy had wept or even showed a little grief, Michel would have been kneeling at her feet, but still quivering with the anger of her wounded pride, Miss Severn would have blushed to yield to such weakness.

Michel had read the letter to the end, perhaps to keep himself in countenance. He again glanced over it.

Suzanne, exasperated, went on with clenched teeth:

"You shall not go to Barbizon; you shall not go; I forbid it."

Trémor raised his eyes and looked steadily at the young girl.

"You forbid me?" he repeated.

Then he interrupted himself; Suzanne's eyes were glittering, he thought he saw a tear in them.

"Come," he said, trying to take her hands again; "don't get so excited; it is absurd. I grew angry too soon. I was sharp, I — let me explain —"

She pushed him away with a nervous laugh.

"Explain how badly the insignificant child understands the great man you are? Thank you. It is enough to have told that horrible woman."

Suddenly chilled, Trémor had recoiled. Ah! it was that sentence of Comtesse Wronska which had wounded Suzanne! She was humiliated.

"Then," he replied, "you believe I could have said that you were insignificant and that you did not understand me? Do me the honour to think that, if I *had* so considered you, I should not have had the bad taste to make Comtesse Wronska my confidante."

In all sincerity, Michel did not remember having expressed such an opinion. His recollection of the strange, brief interview on the jetty of Trouville was not at all definite. What he did know was that when Comtesse Wronska's presence evoked the phantom of Faustine Morel, he had not given his poor little fiancée a single thought.

"You did not tell her either that you were marrying

from discouragement? You have said as much to me. I am not so insignificant as I look, and I can read."

Miss Severn had risen, standing very straight in her long gown; each word farther complicated the misunderstanding. A single one would have brought together these two people who loved each other, but it had risen to the lips of neither. Their hearts suffered, but their pride uttered the plaint of these wounded hearts. Both were right and both wrong; there lay the secret of their miserable quarrel. Yet Suzanne was so pale that Michel was alarmed. His fiancée, perhaps, did not love him. But he loved her. Whether the suffering that blanched her face was vanity or grief, he felt her pain and wanted to relieve it.

"I beg you," he said again, "calm yourself. I swear that I have said nothing to Comtesse Wronska that could offend your dignity; I swear . . ."

She had taken a few steps, choking a little, but with her head held high.

"What is the use of so many words," she interrupted with infinite impertinence. "Go to Barbizon, my dear friend, and enjoy there all the happiness possible . . . awake the past! Perhaps this time no Comte Wronski will appear.— You must not be too resentful or too proud.— Go, go, it is the best thing for you to do."

This sarcasm enraged Trémor.

"Ah, that is the best thing for me to do," he cried. "Well, I will go; you are right; I will go all the more because I cannot understand through what ridiculous feeling of pride you could consider as an insult my

visit to two women who are very lonely and very unhappy. As to the past, have no anxiety; nothing could wake it; it is wholly dead . . . and my heart too. I will follow your advice, Suzanne, and go to Barbizon to-morrow."

"If you do, Michel," Suzanne instantly retorted, contradicting herself with more angry excitement than sound logic, "I tell you that everything will be over between us."

Michel shrugged his shoulders.

"What you say is childish; you know that as well as I do."

"Childish? I don't believe it. I'll marry somebody else."

"Whom, if you please?" asked the young man.

Suzanne drew herself up, exclaiming furiously:

"Who tells you that I love no one, that I have not suffered and struggled?"

He vainly tried to control himself.

"Oh, why, I beg to enquire? I suppose nothing compelled you to accept my offer?"

She looked at him scornfully, then in a stinging voice:

"You forget my love of money, my dear friend."

Trémor almost cried out in his pain, but he bit his lips.

"Do not suffer, do not struggle, Suzanne," he said with great calmness; "only reflect — I do not know whether I am acquainted with the happy mortal to whom you allude, but I might break his head before your wedding day . . ."

"Oh, I don't care," answered Suzanne with the utmost sincerity.

Flung into the midst of the quarrel, this little absurdity seemed to Michel positively delicious. In the depths of his soul, perhaps, he had instantly appreciated the young girl's threats at their real value, but for an instant the idea that his fiancée might love another had maddened him to a degree that made him see red, and he had talked as foolishly as Suzanne herself.

"You have made me forget," he said, recovering his self-control, "that you are only a spoiled child. But listen to me — let me speak, I beg," he added with authority. "I have told you that I no longer loved Comtesse Wronska. I repeat it. I also repeat what I said just now, that nothing was said between her and myself for which your pride would have a right to reproach me. I met the comtesse at Trouville by accident, the night before my departure for Norway. I have not seen her since. Nevertheless, I shall go to Barbizon tomorrow, first because I shall thus perform an act of courtesy, and then because I wish to show you that, however ready I may be to fulfil the wishes you choose to express, I shall never receive orders from anyone."

Suzanne clenched her hands, burying the nails in the palms but, in her rage, found no words to answer.

"I am somewhat rude," added Trémor, "but I warned you that I had a very bad temper."

There was a silence, then he said more gently:

"I will return to the tower of Saint-Sylvère; it will be better for us both. We shall be calmer to-morrow."

He had a confused hope for a word that would detain him, but Suzanne's answer was very distinct.

"You are right; go away; it is infinitely better. Good-bye."

Yet Miss Severn mechanically put out her hand, and Michel had a cowardly desire to draw the young girl suddenly into his arms and tell her that she had nothing to fear from Comtesse Wronska nor any other woman, and at a single word, the most repentant, the most humble of men would give up going to Barbizon. But he knew how to be brave and, pressing very slightly the hand extended to him, he left the room.

A few seconds after, Colette entered; Suzanne had quickly taken up a book.

"What is the matter, little Zanne?" asked Madame Fauvel affectionately. "Michel came to bid me farewell, with some foolish excuse."

"We had a little quarrel, for a trifle, as usual," replied Suzanne.

She had the reserve of her grief, and besides she feared the indiscretion of Colette, who often talked at random. Michel must know nothing of what was passing in her mind, or the tears burning on her lashes, which she would not let flow.

"A lover's quarrel?"

"Yes." And Miss Severn spoke of the Pontmaurys.

III

MICHEL was less compassionate than he had affected to be concerning the fate of the two "lonely and unhappy women," who appealed to him for aid. He had long since lost all illusion about Madame Morel's character, and now thought he knew Faustine too well to be the dupe of the sincerity of her despair. At Paris, and again at Trouville, he had thought he understood that Stanislas Wronski's widow was ready to refasten the broken chain. The beautiful comtesse was now risking a last play; she summoned a friend, and hoped to keep a husband.

This was what Michel had read in the lines of bitter resignation from Barbizon. The brilliant siren who had dazzled the Russian court would consider the love of her former admirer only as a last resort. Doubtless the pleasure of taking from Miss Severn a future husband whom, perhaps, she loved, might attract Faustine; but let another Comte Wronski appear,— and farewell to the renewed idyl!

Indifference is merciful: Michel forgave Comtesse Wronska her present calculation and her past disdain, but there was in the unlucky letter a sentence referring to Suzanne which had irritated him, though he had avoided saying so to the young girl.

A moment had sufficed to restore Michel's doubts. Was he loved? He did not know, and yet he felt that

— even if he were — his life would be none the less anxious and disturbed. He could never shake off the memory of what Susy had recalled the evening before by a childish remark which, however, expressed an actual fact. In consenting to marry her cousin, Miss Severn had thought of little except the fortune offered. Now, at the time when perhaps the avowal of his love was expected, desired — for with much pride there had also been a little emotion thrilling through Suzanne's anger — discouragement overwhelmed Michel. Yet how he worshipped the capricious child! With what joy he was coming to her when he found her pale, with Faustine's letter in her hand! Her displeasure was natural, but why should she have expressed only rage and humiliation? Why had not she wept? Why had she sought and instantly found the most cruel things that could be said?

Now Suzanne must know that she was not permitted to say: "I forbid," when she scorned to say: "I entreat you . . ."

So he had determined to go to Barbizon, and the day after the quarrel he went to the station, feeling much more inclined to shut himself up in the tower of Saint-Sylvère with his books, than to listen to Madame Wronska's woes.

To his surprise, the name awaked only a very distant echo. His anger was subsiding. Faustine said she was unhappy. Perhaps, after all, she was. Gently, with deep respect, he would show her that she was on the wrong path. His whole happiness was the love of Suzanne. But if his advice was requested, he would en-

deavour to be the trustworthy friend of which the letter spoke.

While thinking of these things, Trémor heard some one call him and saw Daran, whom he did not expect in Rivailler until the following week.

They walked side by side a moment, then Daran asked where Michel was going.

"I take the eleven o'clock train," he answered in a somewhat resigned tone; "I am going to Barbizon."

"To Barbizon, all alone? On business?"

"Yes, on business."

"Is it very urgent?"

"Yes and no," Michel again replied, indifferently.

"Is there no way of writing? And we would pass a pleasant day together. I have brought a lot of things to my house, and I have so much to tell you. Doesn't that tempt you?"

It did tempt him greatly. He was not in the mood for confidences, but it seemed as if talking about old times would divert his thoughts. Yet he hesitated. On no account must Suzanne believe that he had surrendered.

"Are you afraid of vexing your fiancée?" asked Daran.

"No; she is not expecting me to-day."

"Capital! Come, Trémor, is there no way of putting off your business."

"Yes," Michel at last answered, still somewhat undecidedly.

"Then I'll carry you off," cried Daran; "you shall write at my house. I'll send the letter to the station, and we won't part until the evening."

Miss Severn had not slept much the night before. In the evening she had said she was going back to her former mode of life, which the doctor had already authorised.

So the next morning she prepared to deaden her grief and the disagreeable reflections which could not fail to assail her all day. Not content with accompanying Colette to Précroix, she talked, laughed, and did her best to enter into the noisy welcome bestowed by Claude and the two little girls. Yet her imagination wandered far away, beneath the great trees of Barbizon, where, leaning on the arm of someone she knew well, moved a light, graceful figure.

She involuntarily pictured Comtesse Wronska as very beautiful, very different from a certain little American girl — alas! She gave her a tall, slender person, bands of velvety black hair framing classic features, and a lily complexion. How could Michel help comparing Faustine's statuesque profile with poor Susy's little mobile face?

Suzanne felt, at times, so little able to please him! She knew that she was pretty, at least that many people thought her so; but she could not define her own charm, far less consciously make it a power. And in Michel's presence, she felt disarmed; all struggle was vain.

That day Suzanne thought herself ugly and ill-dressed. Comtesse Wronska had only to appear to conquer. And yet, why had Michel chosen his fiancée? Comtesse Wronska was a widow, and Michel knew it at the very time he had asked for the hand of Suzanne Severn.

Thus Suzanne tried to soothe her anxieties, while listening absently to May Béthune's chatter. She told herself that Michel was no longer the indifferent lover of the early days of their engagement; she lived over the previous hours spent in Colette's little drawing-room. Then, returning to her jealous fears, she jeered at herself. Michel had been touched by the danger of a delicate creature, but how far removed from real love was this vague affection or trivial pity! One look from Faustine would forever destroy this budding tenderness. Michel had been unable to resist Comtesse Wronska's entreaty. She had said: "I shall be two days in Barbizon," and on the first day he had joined her. Yet Miss Severn still wondered if Michel had carried out his intention. Nothing proved that he had gone to Barbizon and, if he had, nothing proved that he had talked with Comtesse Wronska about anything except business.

The meeting at Trouville had been purely accidental, and nothing had been said which could offend his fiancée. Michel had told her so in a tone which gave a simple assertion the value of an oath. The idea of doubting his words had never come to Susy.

Alas! he might answer for the past, he might protest that his intentions were loyal, but when he had seen the charmer. . . . Susy longed to avenge herself upon someone, Michel even more than Faustine.

On returning home she tried to read a novel, but her eyes scanned the pages in vain. Then a letter was brought to her, dated at a village near Rivailler, and containing a heartbroken message from poor Paul.

"*Dear Miss Susy:*

"Jacques and Thérèse think I am in Paris, so does Simone, but I did not have the courage to go away. You know that my happiness depends upon Jacques's consent — he is his sister-in-law's guardian; this consent has been refused, and my sole hope is in you. Two persons only have sufficient influence over my brother to make him change a decision that he has once taken, Thérèse and Michel. We have won over Thérèse, but Michel, whose intercession might perhaps be decisive, is too great a philosopher himself not to be a little hard upon blunderers like me. He will plead my cause only when you have persuaded him, dear Miss Susy. Michel worships you, and he is right. Let your voice and your pretty eyes take part in the matter, and all will go well.

"To-morrow, Monday, I will be at the hunting lodge at the cross-roads of the Stone-Cross from four to six o'clock. If you and Michel will ride in that direction, it will be a great happiness to the poor wretch who here assures you, dear good fairy, of his most respectful and absolute devotion.

"Your friend,

"PAUL."

"Poor Paul!" murmured Suzanne.

The exclamation meant also: "Poor Suzanne! You must address yourself to Comtesse Wronska, Paul; the eloquence of the pretty eyes in which you trust is likely to be disdained. As for the ride to the Stone-Cross, what irony! Michel has little idea of riding with his fiancée.

"Poor, poor Paul!"

The young girl did not dwell long upon this thought. The romance of Paul Réault and Simone Chazé seemed as commonplace as the yellow-covered book brought from Précroix. There was only one romance in the world, the one which had commenced on a certain March day, very poetically, beneath the bluish light of a Gothic glass window, near the mysterious tomb of a crusader.

Miss Severn had avoided confiding in or complaining to her cousin who, in her joy at seeing May Béthune, had asked no questions. Before dinner, Monsieur Fauvel, who had just entered with Michel, remarked that Suzanne was pale, and the young girl felt her fiancée's eyes resting upon her, but she answered gaily that she felt perfectly well.

Michel seemed to have forgotten the discussion of the evening before. He had held out his hand to Susy as usual, even addressing a few words to her. What did this attitude mean? That he had gone to Barbizon, or that he had given up seeing Faustine?

Sitting beside Colette, Suzanne feigned absolute indifference, but Michel's composure exasperated her. He had questioned Colette about the visit to the Béthune's, but had made no allusion to the employment of his own time during this interminable day.

To tell the truth, it would have cost Michel something to confess what his pride considered as a sort of retreat.

The letter written at Daran's to Comtesse Wronska — a masterpiece of respectful courtesy in which, with an appearance of spontaneity, well-calculated things were said — would have afforded Susy the delight of a triumph, and Michel did not think she deserved it. He

had resolved to leave the young girl in complete uncertainty.

Susy could bear no more, she longed to cry out:

"If you have seen this woman, I want to know it; tell me; tell me quickly. Whatever the truth may be, I prefer it to the ignorance that is preying upon me."

She still watched him, while he went on talking, playing mechanically with the envelope of Paul Réault's letter. But what was the use? He was speaking of Monsieur Pontmaury, of the Stock Exchange. . . .

He had certainly seen Faustine; he looked happy — at least Susy thought so. What had taken place between them? At any rate, what did he care for having caused her so much uneasiness! Oh! he was cruel.

As Suzanne was reaching the climax of a paroxysm of rage an idea crossed her mind, and a little smile parted her compressed lips.

With a sudden movement she seized the envelope Michel held, and snatched it from him. He glanced at the young girl in surprise; then she lowered her lashes with a somewhat confused manner, saying quickly:

"I beg your pardon, that continual movement of your hand sets my nerves on edge."

But Michel still gazed at her, trying to see the envelope she was hiding.

"Is that a letter you received this evening?" he could not help asking.

"Of course. Then you did not see it?"

"I did not see it."

Susy hurriedly tore in pieces the envelope she had grasped, put them in her pocket, and bent over her book.

Michel continued his discussion with Monsieur Fauvel, but Miss Severn's object was attained; while still speaking of stocks, rumors of the Exchange, etc., he secretly glanced at her and, in the evening, he did the same thing several times.

Struck by the rapidity with which the envelope was seized and destroyed, Michel had doubtless been vaguely uneasy. So much the better! He would suffer, wounded in his fine masculine vanity, and imagining all sorts of things.

"I should like to be sure he isn't sleeping well," she said to herself several times in the course of the night, sleeping very badly herself.

Then she changed her mind: "I am sure that if he isn't sleeping well, he is thinking of that woman."

The next morning, when Michel came to lunch at Castleflore, she felt actually savage. Her plan was made.

She would go alone to the lodge of the Stone-Cross, and avail herself of the appointment with Paul to create a mystery.

She must not think of "losing" the letter from Simone's lover; it was far too plain. Miss Severn took another course. First she waited for a question from Trémor, who often asked her plans for the afternoon then, the enquiry not coming, she took the offensive without farther delay.

"At what hour did you order the carriage, Colette?"

"Two o'clock, was that right?"

"Exactly."

It was Monsieur Fauvel who questioned, somewhat absently:

"Where are you going, Susy?"

"To Marguerite Sainval's."

"All alone?"

"Yes; Colette isn't going."

Silence followed.

"Michel," said Suzanne, "in returning from the Michauds', will it be much longer to pass around by the Stone-Cross?"

The young man seemed surprised.

"No, why?"

"What road do you take? The one at the right of the Michauds' door?"

"Yes — but —"

"Why do you ask that?" said Colette smiling.

"Oh! nothing, just to know."

The conversation changed. Robert and Michel were to take one of the morning trains. They expected to remain in Paris two or three days, and Colette overwhelmed her husband with messages to the concièrge and all the summer members of the household in their home in the Rue de Tilsitt.

"Colette," said Susy suddenly, as if she was pursuing the same idea, "may I go to the Michauds', after my visit to Marguerite?"

"You will not be too tired?"

"Why no, since you are giving me the carriage."

"Do as you please, darling."

The young girl suddenly threw her arms around Madame Fauvel's neck.

"Thank you, my Colinette, thank you!"

"What a madcap!" exclaimed Colette, affectionately returning the kiss.

Susy cast a furtive glance at Michel, then murmured:

"Pardon me; I am nervous since my accident, you see —"

And going to the other end of the drawing-room, she sat down at the piano, lightly touching the keys. Almost instantly Michel rose and leaned on the instrument opposite to her.

"Do you want me to go with you to Chesnaie?" he asked.

She hastily stopped playing.

"That would be absurd! I am going to see Marguerite."

"Well, to the Michauds'. I would go to Chesnaie for you, at any hour you appoint."

"No, I thank you."

"Why?"

"Because it would worry me. I want to be alone."

Michel looked at his fiancée more intently.

"Is my nose crooked?" she asked impatiently.

"No, but you are strange. Yesterday you seemed gay — astonishingly so; I thought you had almost returned to conciliatory feelings, and now . . ."

"Now, I am very gay and not at all vexed with you. You know our quarrels always end so. That is the way with engaged people who are eager to make up. We forget."

"If you have forgotten," the young man insisted,

"why do you refuse me permission to accompany you?"

"I told you — because I want to be alone."

She stopped, then with a somewhat equivocal air of raillery:

"And suppose I, too, had an appointment with — somebody?"

Trémor's face darkened.

"There are jests which are not at all droll, you know."

"Really?" replied little Zanne, with great impertinence.

Then she went away. She was satisfied; Michel had turned a trifle pale. A few minutes after, he came to her.

"You will keep the carriage at the Michauds', won't you?"

"I do not know."

"You will be much too tired to return on foot but, if you absolutely insist upon wasting your strength, let little Louis Michaud go with you through the wood. The days are already much shorter; be prudent."

"I will see."

These laconic answers had a touch of defiance.

"Susy," cried Trémor, "you are planning some piece of folly."

"Perhaps so," she answered with great calmness.

The young man felt exasperated.

"Susy, I —" he began.

But he restrained himself.

"No," he said, between his teeth, "you shall not have the satisfaction of making me angry, which you have been trying to do for half an hour. I really don't know why I spend my time in listening to your nonsense."

And he went to take up a paper.

IV

AS Susy crossed the vestibule, ready for the drive, her fresh face framed in a white hat, her dainty figure in a blue foulard, trimmed with lace, she met Michel.

"You look queer," she flung at him over her shoulder. "Where are you going? To Barbizon?"

"To Daran's," replied Trémor curtly.

"Daran? Has he come?"

"Yes, yesterday."

They had gone down the steps. Susy sprang lightly into the carriage, sat down, arranged her gown on the seat, and looked at the young man.

"Why do you look so queer?"

"How queer, if you please?" replied Michel impatiently.

"I don't know exactly — preoccupied, or else — stop, it's something like the expression I sometimes had when grandmother had told me the story of Little Red Riding Hood, and I was a little afraid — afraid of the wolf, you know."

Michel shrugged his shoulders and, as the presence of the servants prevented any reply, made a sign to the coachman. The horses instantly dashed forward.

Suzanne was jubilant, if the word can be applied to the angry excitement which thrilled her at the thought that Michel would spend the day in struggling with the doubts and suspicions that had beset her since the even-

ing before, and perhaps pass the afternoon in wandering about the wood, between the Michauds' house and the Stone-Cross,— that the proud fellow would be jealous in his turn.

Miss Severn somewhat exaggerated the effect of her little manœuvres upon her fiancé.

Suzanne's words and manner had seemed strange, marked by a sort of affectation unusual in the young girl. It was not the haste with which she had acted the evening before that seemed to him suspicious. Miss Severn was far too clever to take possession in that way of any letter she had desired to conceal. Besides, Michel thought he still saw her beautiful eyes, so pure, so tender. He reached the belief that Susy's only fault was to arrange some childish revenge, and doubtless a portion of this plotted vengeance, perhaps the whole of it, was these questions concerning the hunting lodge of the Stone-Cross, these artless allusions, so plainly intended to suggest a meeting.

A rather sad smile rested on the young man's lips.

How ingenious she was in causing him pain!

The sun was shining brightly upon the crimsoning leaves; heather carpeted the slopes; iris and myosotis had bloomed in the damp ditches. But Nature's last effort to be beautiful did not win a glance from the pedestrian who was slowly going toward Albert Daran's little house.

Just as he was approaching the goal of his solitary walk, he formed a resolution. Granting one last delay to his cowardice, he vowed to himself that on his return from Paris — two or three days later — he would have

the decisive explanation with Susy already too long deferred.

After an hour's chat, Michel left his friend and almost mechanically turned toward the Stone-Cross. On the highway, he met the carriage from Castelflore, returning empty, and questioned the coachman. Miss Severn had stopped at the Michauds', and intended to return on foot.

The more Michel reflected, the more singular Suzanne's conduct appeared. Then he saw Paul Réault walking thoughtfully along the road. His heart seemed to stop beating and, in less than a second, one of those seconds of mental excitement during which we can re-live years, he recalled Paul's attentions to Suzanne at Cannes, at Rivailler, remembered Miss Severn's long conversations with Jacques's brother, their dances at the Chesnaie ball, the enthusiastic admiration openly expressed by Paul. But, by a miracle of will, he soon regained possession of himself and went to meet the young man, who had probably not seen him.

"It is you," he said, almost smiling; "I thought you were in Paris."

Suddenly roused from his brooding, Paul had started.

"In Paris?" he replied, "then Miss Severn has not told you?"

"Miss Severn?" repeated Michel, while the smile vanished from his lips.

Paul was troubled for a moment then, as if making up his mind, slipped his arm through Michel's.

"Well, my dear fellow, I am going to tell you the whole story myself," he exclaimed with friendly frank-

ness; "but listen indulgently for, crazy as I may appear, I am very unhappy."

They reached the Stone-Cross a little before four o'clock. Without knowing it, Paul had acted like a consummate diplomat. His confidences fell into a heart wide open to receive them. Better, more completely than Miss Severn could have done, he won the cause of his happiness with Trémor. But he was surprised to have to tell this kind confessor everything. Michel explained:

"Your letter must have come yesterday evening, and Susy and I have not had five minutes to talk together alone."

Paul was content with this reason; his mind was elsewhere.

"Listen, my lad," said Michel, who treated his friend Jacques's younger brother somewhat as if he were a younger brother of his own; "I will speak to Réault this very evening, only we must have an understanding. Would you be inclined to make a sacrifice, to work seriously? Daran was speaking of you to me an hour ago."

The fact was that Daran, ignorant of the young man's recent errors, had had the same thought as Miss Severn. He knew Paul as a good fellow, intelligent and upright, and he hoped the tempting offer of a secure position at a good salary — even though it were in America — would decide the new engineer to shake off his inertia and utilise his diploma. Michel had appeared less confident when Albert explained the plan. Now he submitted it to this Parisian of a Paul with some anxiety, but at the first words the latter's enthusiasm

equalled Simone's. At the last, he was within an ace of hugging Trémor.

"Then it would suit you?"

"Suit me? Why, America is the land of my dreams! America and Simone! My dear fellow, it is enough to kill one with joy! You'll see, you'll see, I shall become a second Edison! Or rather, no, it will be Edison who will be nothing but a second Paul Réault! Jacques himself will sing my praises, and meanwhile he will give me Simone. Oh! my dear Trémor, my preserver, how lucky I was to meet you!"

Michel smiled, though not very gaily.

"Daran is dining with me," he said; "come too. In the evening, I will go and say a few words to Jacques, leaving Albert and you to talk the matter over."

With somewhat melancholy kindness, he listened to the future plans Paul improvised, and the grateful praise he bestowed upon his first confidante, Suzanne.

"She may arrive at the Stone-Cross presently," said Michel, trying to speak in a smiling, natural tone. "I am going to wait here for her."

Paul smiled.

"A capital idea! She will have a pleasant surprise, when she sees to whom I have yielded my place. And you have well deserved this interview. But, you know, when I am engaged I shall adopt the American system."

Paul went off radiant. Michel watched him with an indulgent look, which quickly saddened. He was vexed with Suzanne for having played this wretched farce, and also for having intended — in all probability — to go alone to a meeting which Paul should never have allowed

her to give him. Then, above all, he could not forgive the young girl the moment of torture when, in spite of himself, he had remembered that she had once said wildly, cruelly:

"I love another."

Suzanne had vaguely expected that Michel would join her at the Michauds' and, on leaving their house, she felt somewhat disappointed.

Was he perhaps following her without letting himself be seen? One could easily hide in the thick woods bordering the road, but even if her expected meeting with Paul Réault had not rendered it impossible, she would never have let little Louis Michaud go with her — that is, follow Michel's advice.

It was broad daylight, and the wood presented no forbidding appearance on this beautiful afternoon in late September. Susy walked on leisurely.

At last she reached the hunting lodge at the Stone-Cross. But the round hall with its brown walls was deserted.

Paul's absence surprised Susy, for it was nearly five o'clock, but she patiently sat down to wait. She felt a little constraint at having to confess that she had not spoken to Michel, but she intended to explain her silence by wishing to know Paul's view of America before commencing to discuss the subject either with Michel or Monsieur Daran.

It was not, however, of Paul and Simone that Miss Severn thought most during this tiresome waiting at the Stone-Cross. The interview at Barbizon was haunting her. Occupied by the remembrance of Faus-

tine, Michel had not troubled himself about the return of his fiancée, nor her mysterious allusions.

Still Paul did not arrive. An hour passed. The sun's disc was no longer visible; a pale, quivering rosy light veiled the sky, touching the tops of the trees; day was closing. Suddenly seized with a sort of fear, Susy left the lodge; she had been foolish to linger so in the midst of the woods. It was imprudent. She hesitated; then resolutely took a path at her left, which led down a rather steep slope. She knew that it ran diagonally across the wood to the widest road which extended through the forest and fields of Castelflore.

Involuntarily, Suzanne thought of her first meeting with Michel; she remembered her fears, then the walk to Précroix in the darkness and silence.

Since that time, a whole spring, a whole summer, had passed. And now it was Michel's fiancée, the new fiancée of the inconsolable knight, who was passing along the leafy paths. Yet she was alone. The name written in the chapel had not caused forgetfulness of the other, the one graven forever upon the tomb and in the heart of the dead warrior. If Michel had experienced any jealousy he had quickly suppressed this impulse of his pride. And Susy felt ashamed of her little stratagem, so sadly futile.

Yet, at times, she still wondered if Michel had not followed her. The crackling of the dry leaves sometimes suggested a footstep.

By degrees, the impression of a step mysteriously keeping pace with her own, took possession of Miss Severn. The person walking there was Michel; it could

be no one but Michel, she repeated to herself; yet to know that he might suddenly emerge from the darkness terrified the young girl.

And if it were not Michel? If it were — someone else?

Suzanne's limbs froze; the blood hummed in her ears; a wild desire to fly seized her. Then she suddenly perceived, a few yards before her, the figure of a man and, almost at the same moment, recognised Michel.

An intense feeling of relief, joy, delicious security, succeeded her fright so swiftly that her first impulse was to throw herself into his arms; but Michel's attitude by no means encouraged this outburst of feeling, and Miss Severn paused before him, trying to assume a jaunty air, while in her throat and on her lashes were symptoms of a great desire to weep.

"I am delighted to meet you, Michel; I did not know it would grow dark so soon —"

A sarcastic smile curled Trémor's lips.

"Isn't this the way you used to look when you had been reading 'Little Red Riding Hood'?" he said pitilessly.

At this sally Suzanne was on the point of bursting into tears, but she restrained herself.

"You have come from the Michauds'?" asked Michel.

"And you?" she retorted saucily.

"I have been to see Daran; I thought I told you so."

"I thought I told you, too, that I was going to the Michauds'."

"You stayed there a long time."

She was silent, wondering whether Michel had followed

her, or whether he was really coming from Daran's. This latter conjecture prevailed; for his manner was so indifferent and cold, that the fact of his coming would merely have indicated great concern about propriety.

Michel did not even continue his questioning, but said simply:

"I suppose you are going back to Castelflore?"

"Yes, of course."

They began to walk along the narrow path, close to each other, and yet so far apart. By the uncertain light of the dying day, the trees were assuming their strange nocturnal forms. Seized with the almost morbid fear inspired by darkness in the quiet country, Suzanne passed her hand timidly under her companion's arm.

"I don't feel quite easy," she said.

"When one has the terrors of a little girl," replied the young man with more logic than amiability, "it would be infinitely better not to wander alone at all sorts of hours in the woods."

Michel had followed Suzanne from the moment of her leaving the Michauds', and appeared only at the moment when he perceived that fear was taking possession of her. He cherished the same resentment against his fiancée as when he left Paul, and besides, the clandestine walk he had had, not wishing to lose sight of the young girl nor give her the satisfaction of having gained her object, had put him in a very bad humour. But Susy, chilled by this coldness, felt in no mood for farther conversation, and for a long time walked on without uttering a word. Yet, as the darkness gradually increased, she shivered and forgot her dignity.

"Michel, what is that moving yonder? If we should have some unpleasant encounter?"

This time Trémor drew the hand that had sought his protection a little closer and, laughing with less marked irony, asked:

"With whom?"

"Why, I don't know — some poacher."

"Really, why not? Then there are brigands in the woods, splendid plumed brigands who drag people into their caves. Have you read 'Ali-Baba'?"

"Yes," she replied, trying to smile.

"You have nothing to fear while you are with me," said the young man almost gently.

As they reached the highroad, Miss Severn remembered that Michel was going away the next morning for two days. If she delayed speaking of Paul and Simone, she would risk having no opportunity to fulfil the mission she had accepted.

"Michel," she began bravely, "I have something to tell you." Then she related the romance of Paul, spoke of the letter she had received, but neglected to mention the appointment at the Stone-Cross.

Michel listened with immovable coolness. When Susy reached the plan she had in mind, he told her that Daran had had the same idea.

"What good fortune!" cried the young girl with such charming joy that Trémor felt his resentment soften. "Then Michel, you will help these poor lovers, convince Jacques. I assure you that Paul is sincere, and Simone —"

"I will do all that is possible, Suzanne," he answered

gravely. "I believe with you that Paul is sincere. He has been frivolous, idle, but nevertheless he is a good fellow, very loyal and honest. He is not rich, neither is Simone, but they love each other. There would be great cruelty in separating two people who have the happiness of loving and understanding each other."

Repressed emotion thrilled in the young man's voice; Suzanne wondered if he was thinking of Faustine.

"I did not imagine you were so sentimental," she said.

"I shall see Jacques this evening," observed Michel, without noticing the remark.

In the vestibule of Castelflore he stopped.

"Good-bye."

Suzanne started.

"Are not you coming in?"

"No; I have barely time to go back to the tower of Saint-Sylvère. Daran is to dine with me."

"But you are going away with Robert to-morrow," she objected faintly.

"That is all arranged. We shall meet at the station at seven o'clock."

Miss Severn tried to find something to say; she could not let Michel leave her in this way.

"You will write to me?" she asked. "I should like to know the result of your interview with Monsieur Réault."

"Certainly, I will send you a line before leaving. Good-bye."

He pressed her hand and made a movement of departure.

" Michel," she murmured, " don't bid me good-bye unkindly —"

Instinctively she raised her forehead; her head almost touched his breast. Then he quickly pressed closely to him the trusting head, and bending, kissed her closed lids and left her without a word.

It was so swift, so abrupt even that, after having felt happy, reassured, intoxicated with hope, Susy asked herself what she was to believe and if the caress had been tender, spontaneous, or merely obliging. She felt ashamed, ashamed of having begged a kiss which he had not intended to give.

V

In the darkness of her closed room Miss Severn was weeping, and her tears were the tacit avowal of a love which she had long denied or combated. Had she been forced to put this secret confession into words, the terms would have been singular enough. "Michel is unkind; he has no heart; I don't know a more unbearable disposition; life with him is growing intolerable, but I love him with all my strength; I love him absurdly, with the ridiculous love of heroines in novels; in my eyes he is the best, the noblest, the most charming man in the world, and life is no longer possible for me without him."

It was the complete triumph of the vein of romance bequeathed by her grandmother. The most improbable plans agitated the little American's mind. She resolved by turns, if Michel did not love her, to go back to Philadelphia and teach French there, or to stay in France and turn nun. Already, in a childish dream, she saw herself gliding like a shadow along the silent corridors of an old convent, where there would be a great many very fine sculptures, and a large garden full of roses.

But one hope dispelled the mystic vision. Susy closed her eyes and felt Michel's kiss upon their lids. It had been so gentle, so tender. Then everything changed; — what if Comtesse Wronska was in Paris? If Michel was going to meet her? Then she obtained relative peace by repeating to herself that if Michel loved Comtesse Wronska and knew that she was a

widow he would certainly not have asked the hand of a young girl to whom nothing bound him. Who knows; perhaps on his return he would be more indulgent; perhaps happiness was close at hand?

The next morning, on awaking, she received the letter Michel had promised her. She scarcely dared to open the envelope. What did it contain? How would it begin? How would it end? It was the first one Miss Severn had had from Trémor since his return from Norway. At last she opened, read it, and with a heavy sigh, returned the little card to the envelope.

"*My Dear Susy:*

"I saw Daran, Paul, and Jacques yesterday. All is going well. The romance of our lovers will end, I hope, like many romances.

"Hastily yours,

"MICHEL."

How short and commonplace it was! Suzanne did not even ask herself if Paul had spoken to Michel of the meeting at the Stone-Cross. She thought only of the vanity of her own dreams.

"I am glad for those poor children," yet she concluded.

That day Colette, who thought little Zanne looked pale, took her for a drive, but the next afternoon, the children having begged her not to leave them, the young girl seized this pretext for not accompanying her cousin to Chesnaie and Précroix.

She played a game of croquet with Georges, Nysette,

and Claude Béthune, then went to sit down on the bank of the river, where the student soon joined her. They began to talk as they used to do at Cannes, and Miss Severn allowed herself to be diverted by her little friend's chatter.

From time to time a burst of laughter echoed under the sycamores and Claude thought he had again found the chum Susy whose frank manners had charmed him.

"If you knew, Susy," he cried, "how extraordinary it seems to think that in a few weeks you will be Madame Trémor!"

Miss Severn started, recalled to reality, not this intermediate reality, filled with sorrowful forebodings and gloomy ideas, but a more merciful one. Claude told the truth: in a few weeks she would be Michel's wife. Nothing was destroyed. In a few weeks, she would be called Madame Trémor, Madame Michel Trémor, Suzanne Trémor. The words sounded sweet.

"Why does that appear extraordinary to you, Claude?" she asked, smiling.

"Well, in the first place, because I did not suppose Michel would marry at all — and then because I had still less idea of his marrying you."

"But why?"

"I don't know. Because he did not trouble himself at all about young girls; because he led a Wandering Jew life; because he is horribly serious and even a little tiresome —"

"Uncivil!"

"Uncivil, how?"

"Uncivil to me because you do not consider me worthy

to marry a serious man, in the first place; and secondly, uncivil to Michel."

"Has he never bored you?" questioned Claude, with interest.

"Why, no."

"Never, never?"

"Never."

"That is astonishing. But at least do not think I don't like him," the youth went on eagerly; "on the contrary, I adore him, you know. Only it seemed as if, for you and me —"

"Don't put me in the same budget with yourself, if you please."

"As if, for you and me, he was not sufficiently — foolish."

"Better and better," retorted Suzanne, laughing heartily. "Well, then, my dear friend, neither a dandy like Raymond Desplans, nor a giddy fellow like Paul Réault could have pleased me. I am a goose, possibly, but for that very reason I must have a philosopher to charm me; an ignoramus, and so I wanted a scholarly husband; a stupid little person who is capable of talking nonsense with a big booby like you, so I needed a husband who would scold me well, and be my master."

"Ah! you had a good scent," Claude answered. "He is a scholar. And he will be master; have no fear of that."

He looked at the young girl again, then shouting with laughter:

"What you love in him is amazing."

Suzanne turned as red as a poppy, and gave Claude's

hand a good hard slap, but this rebuke did not disturb the future graduate.

"And he, why he should adore you! But to be sure, that isn't astonishing, on the contrary."

"Master Claude," said Suzanne, laughing in spite of herself, "you are horribly indiscreet, do me the favor to keep silent."

"I hope," Claude went on, "that he will sacrifice his old papers to you, that he will say tender nothings to you, that he will look at you all the time — and that he will administer jealous scenes to you in big doses, which — oh! dear, how I would like to see you together!"

"Claude!" cried the young girl, "if you keep on being so curious, I am going away."

"To take my paternal solicitude for curiosity," cried Claude, raising his arms to heaven with so comical a grimace that Susy laughed again.

"Then it has been a thunderbolt?"

"You are wearying me."

"In the first place, you know, I thought it was a prudential marriage, at least on your side, but just now — Ah! I did not even need to hear you speak of Michel; I only had to utter his name and you turned perfectly red. Then!—"

"That is false; I did not turn red at hearing his name; you may suppose that I hear it often enough for it not to surprise me — admitting that the name should make me blush, if it *did* surprise me."

"Pooh! pooh! pooh! you were red to the roots of your hair, even your ears were red."

"Claude, let me alone."

But the love of teasing fairly intoxicated Claude.

"You are an ungrateful creature," he declared; "you don't know what you owe me."

"You?"

"Yes, me."

It is certain that Susy little suspected the problem that had more than once beset Claude in the course of his vacation and, since his arrival at Précroix had literally haunted his giddy brain. Had Miss Severn really received that First of April letter? Had it really been taken seriously, or by some strange chance, had it come with another letter from Michel? In a word, was it really Claude who had made the marriage of his friend Susy with the lord of Saint-Sylvère? The story seemed to him at once so charming and so ridiculous, that he would have sacrificed any pleasure to know that, while appearing so improbable, the amazing affair was true — But, if it were true, could Susy be ignorant of it?

Claude had racked his brains, and often a question had risen to his lips which he had not dared to ask. Now, in the heat of the skirmish, he no longer reasoned.

He gravely drew from his pocket a paper and, pretending to read, began to recite the commencement of the letter he had written to Suzanne; a commencement which had cost him more labour than many Greek and Latin texts and was engraved upon his memory. Susy instantly listened.

"Where did you find that?" she cried, snatching the paper from Claude's hands.

Then she looked at it and saw only a circular for photographic supplies.

"What does this mean, Claude?" she questioned.

Claude had started — it would have needed a very clever person to stop him.

"It means, Mademoiselle Susy, that it was not Michel who asked your hand in marriage; it was I."

She was enquiring with her eyes, no longer able to find words, trying to laugh.

"Madame Fauvel wanted her brother to marry you, and I knew it, and I also knew, having heard it a hundred times, that Michel did not want to marry. The 30th of March, papa and I — the others were at Précroix — as we were leaving the Comédie Française, met Michel. I told him I was making an April Fool for the tutor, and suddenly the thought popped into my head, 'Come, he would be a good one to do!' I had just received your letter, the one in which you told me about the adventure in the Green Sepulchre. So the next morning I wrote one — in the Saint-Sylvère style — taking good care to put inside the envelope in big letters: 'April Fool!' Yet all the same, after it was mailed, I was seized with remorse and fear. What if Susy should not see the words written in the envelope and — and — what if I had made a big blunder! You can imagine what a dressing I should have had from papa! For three nights I never slept a wink. Then one fine day I heard that Miss Severn and Monsieur Trémor were engaged and everybody was pleased, etc., etc. I wondered if my letter had come at the same time as another, a real offer.

Only I did not want to speak of the matter to anybody, not even Michel. But, come now, since it was really my letter that caused your engagement, did not Michel tell you so?"

The human will, above all, the feminine will, is very strong in certain decisive hours; yet perhaps Susy's exaggerated calmness might not have deceived a keener observer than Claude.

"I knew the story of that letter, Claude," she replied, in a tone that was almost imperceptibly altered; "but I did not know that you were the author of this amiable jest. Allow me to compliment you; it was in most exquisite taste."

At that moment Claude thought he might have committed a second blunder, but it was scarcely more than a flash of common sense.

"Come, Susy," he said, "you are not vexed. Do you know what I have said to myself more than once? With his disposition, Michel would have worshipped Miss Severn for months, and even years, without daring to confess it, while, thanks to my letter.— Ah! my letter didn't take long to decide him."

Susy remained silent. Claude began to have fears.

"You won't tell anybody about it, will you?" he entreated. "If my parents knew even now —"

"I will not mention it, Claude," said Suzanne, again recovering her speech; "but have you considered — it is a sort of forgery that you committed and you see how — how serious all this might have been."

She was now speaking with visible effort. Claude seized her hands.

"Suzanne, I have hurt you," he said with sincere sorrow. "I was an idiot to tell you this."

She shook her head.

"No, no; it is much better." Then recovering herself, she added:

"Since I knew it, since I was ignorant only of the name of the bad joker," she continued, succeeding in summoning a smile.

"Then you are not angry with me?"

"Why, no, not at all — only I had to scold you, that you might not do such a thing again."

"But why, if Michel knew —"

Suzanne shook her finger at him in friendly menace.

"Ah! Master Claude," she said, "here are whys enough. Don't exaggerate your paternal rights. You did not make my engagement; you only hastened it a few days."

Miss Severn had risen and was going back to the château. Oh! that horrible little Claude! The unconscious monster!

An automatic mowing machine on the lawn changed the course of the youth's ideas; he talked of other things and stopped at the entrance.

"I must go back to Précroix," he said; "Emile and René Pontmaury are coming with two other fellows. Would you go with me?"

"No, thank you; I am tired."

"You forgive me?"

Suzanne shrugged her shoulders with a little laugh.

"What a simpleton you are! I was not thinking of it."

But when she was alone in her own room, she sank on the sofa, burying her head in the cushions, utterly crushed.

She could not succeed in reaching any clear idea of what had happened six months before, but what did become plain was that Michel's choice had not been free; that she, she — oh! what shame — had accepted a man who had not thought of offering himself to her, that she had written first to this man, had imposed herself upon him. Now she could explain Michel's delays, his strange, hesitating manner during their conversation at Précroix. But then — Comtesse Wronska?

The collapse was complete. All the good reasons Suzanne had given herself to prove that she was really the chosen bride, ceased to be valid. No doubt the little cousin had unconsciously prevented the reconciliation desired by Faustine and also by Michel; no doubt, at certain times, especially since he had again seen the beautiful comtesse, Michel detested the fiancée whom he had not chosen, execrated Claude, and desired a breach.

At this thought, Suzanne for a moment was actually crazed. She would fly; she would not have Colette find her that evening — or Michel the next day — still at Castelflore.

Hastily throwing a quantity of all sorts of articles into a bag which closed as if by miracle, she rang for Colette's maid, and using for a pretext a letter she had found in her room when she went to it, she said that she was summoned immediately to Paris, and would take the next train without waiting for Madame Fauvel's return.

"Tell Madame," she added, "that I beg her to excuse me, and that I will write. I am taking only what is absolutely necessary."

"Has Mademoiselle received bad news?" asked the maid.

"Not exactly, but the person who wants me is a very old friend, and I cannot defer my departure."

As a carriage went every day to the station at five o'clock for the provisions that came from Paris, Suzanne availed herself of it.

A feverish energy supported her. Now with a longing for hope, she told herself that perhaps all was not lost. No; she did not believe that Michel had ever detested or cursed her. Sometimes she had imagined herself beloved, and the facts remained the same. Yet how stern, cruel, above all, indifferent he had been, since the day the letter from Barbizon had come, since he had again seen Comtesse Wronska!

Suzanne did not weep; her eyes were dry and burning; the sobs stopped in her throat and stifled her. Her head ached violently.

An accident might have caused Michel to arrive at five o'clock; then poor little Zanne would have flung herself into his arms, saying wildly:

"Comfort me; take me away; tell me that nothing is true, that I have been dreaming, that you do love me, that I have nothing to fear near you — that we will never part again!"

But Michel had not taken the train, and Suzanne, obeying her first impulse, went to seek the hospitality of Mademoiselle Gémier, who was keeping a modest

boarding school for young girls in the Rue-Saints-Pères.

Before going to Madame Béthune's, Suzanne had spent several days with her former governess; she had been there when she went alone to Paris; there were a hundred reasons why they would think of seeking her there — and, besides, had she not told the maid that she was answering the summons of an old friend? They would understand.

Meanwhile she had decided not to write; Michel would return to Rivailler the next morning; if, uneasy at this sudden departure, he should go to Mademoiselle Gémier's, Suzanne might believe herself beloved and would tell him all; if, on the contrary, he quietly waited for the letter to Colette — Oh! then all would be ended! And Suzanne would write. What? She did not yet know. She only knew that the letter would be the final breach more or less desired by Michel. The idea of being wedded through duty or compulsion terrified Aunt Régine's granddaughter; now that she loved, she wished to be loved.

Oh! if Michel would only come; if, as before, he scolded little Zanne; if he made her weep as he did the morning after the ball at Chesnaie, and then — after being very unkind, very angry, very jealous — he should kneel again, as he had done that day. What joy, Oh! what joy that would be!

Suzanne was very pale, her head ached.

After dinner, pleading great fatigue to escape the questions and caresses of Mademoiselle Gémier, she retired early. When she had mechanically undressed and

gone to bed in the little room, so dreary in spite of its flowered curtains, she could at last weep and reason. At this hour she was beginning dimly to comprehend that her departure had been a foolish act. But the evil was done, and Suzanne resolved to go to the end of the path she had entered, however imprudently.

So she buried her head in the pillows, trembling lest, in the next room, her sobs might be heard.

"Oh, Michel," she faltered, very softly, longing to speak, to tell her distress to him who, perhaps even in thought, was so far away from her —"my Michel, my fiancé, my husband; I am in such grief."

VI

Colette had the maid repeat twice Suzanne's brief explanations.

"Miss Severn will write when she arrives?"

"Yes, Madame."

"You are sure that she did not tell you why she was called to Paris, or at least give the name of the person who called her?"

"Miss Severn only said: a very old friend."

"It is Mademoiselle Gémier. That's just like Suzanne," Colette concluded.

Then, left alone with Nysette, she sat down in a corner of the little drawing-room and sighed heavily.

Long ago, more quickly than Michel, she had accepted Suzanne's eccentricities. Even at this moment, she was not uneasy, but she confessed that she was vexed, irritated by this new freak of her cousin. Castelflore with neither Robert, Michel, or Suzanne would lose its charm. Colette was angry with Mademoiselle Gémier for having taken away her little Zanne — and for what whim, Heaven only knew. She was vexed with Suzanne for having gone without any one's advice. She was vexed with herself for feeling so weary, so unoccupied, so dull in her solitude.

Again Madame Fauvel sighed and this time the sigh resembled a yawn. Nysette wanted some "grown person" to play with her. The "grown person" present answered rather sharply, which seemed so sur-

prising from those ever-smiling lips that the little girl did not persist, but with an air of offended dignity, went to look out of the window.

Impetuously clapping her hands, she turned to her mother:

"Here's Tonti! Here's Tonti!"

Madame Fauvel shrugged her shoulders.

"Why no, simpleton, that isn't Tonti. Tonti is in Paris."

"It *is* Tonti!" Nysette insisted; "he is coming up the avenue with a gentleman I know."

This time Colette rose. It was really Michel. A few minutes later he entered the little drawing-room, followed by Albert Daran.

"Did not Robert come back with you?" asked Madame Fauvel with a slight tinge of anxiety, as she went to meet her brother.

"Robert will not return for two or three days; he has found more business than he expected," replied Trémor.

Reassured, and already delighted by this diversion which had come in the midst of an attack of boredom, she held out her hand to Daran, made him sit down, and instantly asked a multitude of questions, hardly waiting for the answers. Michel had also taken a seat, but remained silent. The maid had carried off Nysette, not without tears and resistance, but contrary to his custom, the young man had paid no attention to the noisy disappointment of his little niece. He let his sister talk with Daran a moment, then very quickly, with an emotion that betrayed itself slightly by a little contraction of the lips, he asked:

"Does Suzanne know that I am here?"

"Suzanne?" said Colette, recalled to her anger; "oh, don't let us talk of Suzanne. She is in Paris, my dear brother."

"What, in Paris?" repeated Michel almost sternly.

"Yes, in Paris. She is simply crazy," replied Colette.

And, half laughing, she explained, commenting copiously as she spoke. Michel listened, frowning.

"She went while you were at Précroix, without waiting for you, without leaving a message?"

"She did not have time to leave a message. But, really, it seems to me that Mademoiselle Gémier might have waited until to-morrow."

At first Michel did not answer, then suddenly seizing his sister's wrist, he said in a changed voice:

"Colette, you knew nothing, neither she, nor you, did you? She, especially, she did not know?"

Actual bewilderment stiffened Madame Fauvel's features.

"What is it?" she asked in a stifled tone.

Michel was breathing with difficulty, his hand pressed upon his aching forehead.

"My poor little sister," he said, "misfortunes often come very quickly. The Metropolitan Bank has failed, and as all or nearly all my fortune —"

With a cry, Colette had thrown herself into the young man's arms.

"Oh! my poor darling brother!"

Michel silently clasped her, happy to find her, at least, faithful, loving, and so agitated, so distressed

by his trouble. He kissed her several times with great tenderness, then with his cheek pressed against Colette's brow, he murmured:

"You don't think she knew it, tell me? No one could have told her. That is not the reason she has gone?"

Colette started.

"Suzanne? Why, my poor Michel, you are dreaming. How could she have learned what I did not know myself?"

"The Béthunes?"

"The Béthunes, certainly not. Béthune is away and May never keeps up with the news. Besides, Susy has seen no one either to-day or yesterday."

"And the papers? Remember that this is a catastrophe to others as well as to me. Last evening's papers were full of it."

"Nonsense! Suzanne hardly knew that your money was in the Metropolitan Bank — and as for the papers, we have not read them. I am sure of it. I have not left her to-day, except to go to Précroix and — there," said Colette, whose eyes had chanced to fall upon the little table where lay a pile of newspapers still in their wrappers, "look at the papers!"

"And then," Michel went on, "even if she had learned anything, she would not have gone away — she would have waited for me — you think so, too, don't you?"

"Certainly, she would have waited for you — unless she had started to join you."

Trémor shook his head; not the faintest glimmer of hope brightened his eyes.

"Oh! no!" he said.

Colette reflected.

"You are right; if she had had the least suspicion of the truth, she would have waited to see me, to talk with me; no, she knew nothing."

Trémor hid his face in his sister's hair.

"Oh! my darling, my darling," he said, "encourage me — tell me again that you believe she would have waited for me, that you are sure of it."

"Why, yes, my poor dear Michel; yes, I am sure of it; Suzanne would have stayed. In the fear of missing you, she would have waited for you, and she would have told me all. She loves you, I know, and —"

"Has she told you so?"

Colette seemed bewildered.

"No, but I have seen it plainly."

Michel laughed sorrowfully.

"Ah! You have seen it; you are very fortunate."

He released himself from Madame Fauvel's embrace, and went back to the seat he had occupied the instant before.

Colette seemed discouraged.

"Did no one suspect anything?" she asked.

"No one," replied Trémor; "you remember the other evening your husband was talking with me about the Metropolitan Bank, he had learned that there were unpleasant rumours in circulation. But it was all so vague and improbable that I attached no great importance to it. Besides, Maître Allinges, whom I saw

on arriving in Paris, thought it a press sensation. Then, the evening of day before yesterday, the news was suddenly spread of the suicide of Moreau-Fromont, the manager of the Metropolitan Bank. And the next day, the disaster was known. Poor devils who thought they had invested their fortune wisely, like myself, found themselves ruined in a single day."

"But what has happened?"

Michel seemed tired out; Daran answered for him.

"Moreau-Fromont, with two of the directors, disregarding the by-laws, had involved the bank in a colossal buying up of something to create a monopoly. No one suspected it. But proceedings had been commenced against the syndicate which was at the head of the affair. Then Moreau-Fromont saw that all was lost, and shot himself, the wretch — which does not make up for what has happened, alas!"

Colette, bewildered by these explanations, which she only half understood, asked:

"Is the disaster complete; is all Michel's money swallowed up in it?"

"We must wait for the settlement, Madame," replied Daran; "but I do not believe that it could give very satisfying results."

Trémor shrugged his shoulders.

"I am among the fortunate ones," he said, "since, thanks to my house in the Rue des Belles-Feuilles, I have enough to ensure me a living and can enter some business. Ah! Heaven, if it were only myself!"

He interrupted himself, returning to the same torturing idea.

"I wanted to tell her what has happened, to reassure her concerning the future, to say that I would work, that — and she must leave in this way!"

He spoke with ill-repressed anger.

"Come, brother dear," replied Colette, with a little reproach in her affectionate voice, "you must be fair. Suzanne could not divine that you would come and why. Do you believe that —"

"I don't know, I don't know," he interrupted, as if dreading what Colette might say. "The fact of not finding her here, when I am sad, unfortunate, has depressed me. Oh! I would give ten, twenty years of my life to be sure that she knew nothing."

"But, my child," said Colette, with a maternal air, "you can easily discover. Mademoiselle Gémier lives at 35 Rue des Saints-Pères. Go and see Suzanne tomorrow."

"Oh; no," replied Michel harshly; "not on any account. She said that she would write to you when she arrived, didn't she? We will see if she does. I wish her to feel free, absolutely free, and — admitting that she finds herself confronted with a decision to be made — under no outside influence, not even that of my affection and my grief. If she does not write, well — then I will consider."

"But," suggested Madame Fauvel, "if I should write to her, just a line, a little commonplace note —"

With a nervous, abrupt movement, he seized his sister's hands.

"Listen, Colette," in the broken voice he had used at

times since he came into the little room, "you must promise that you will not try to seek Suzanne, that you will not write to her, that you will not tell Robert to go to her, that you will do nothing, nothing, until she has given some sign of life, *she* — I depend upon it, you see, I insist upon it. If you disobey me, I — I should never forgive you. I have serious reasons for speaking in this way."

"I promise, my dear brother," answered Madame Fauvel sadly, "you know better than I, and yet —"

He looked at her intently.

"It is a promise."

"Besides, perhaps she will write," Trémor went on. "As soon as you receive her letter, you will wire me, won't you? For then, you understand, I shall go to see her."

He interrupted himself, and added gently:

"But, my poor little Colette, I am thinking only of myself. You had something in the Metropolitan Bank, too,— about twenty thousand francs."

Colette made a little gesture of indifference. She had never estimated the cost of the luxury which was as necessary to her as the air she breathed, and with which her uncle and her husband had surrounded her. Yet she said:

"Is Robert much troubled?"

"He is troubled, certainly; it is always very annoying to lose a considerable sum, but he thought only of me. He has been the best, the most affectionate of brothers to me, Colette. I shall never forget it. He

and Daran have been a genuine support. And I greatly needed them; at the first moment, these blows are somewhat hard to bear."

He had risen, instantly followed by Albert.

"Are you going," cried Colette quickly.

He made a gesture of assent.

"To Paris?"

"To-morrow morning, yes, but I wanted to see you, Suzanne and you. Now I will go back to Saint-Sylvère, where I have some papers to look up."

"Are you going to dine alone?" she persisted.

"Daran will dine and go back with me to-morrow."

"And Robert will not return for three days?"

"In three days, probably — yes — good-bye for the present, my darling sister."

He took her in his arms and kissed her, saying:

"Think of your poor brother," then clasping her closer, he added:

"You will telegraph me at once, Rue Beaujon, won't you? At once?"

Colette began to weep.

"Oh! I beseech you, Michel," she entreated, "stay and dine at Castelflore, Monsieur Daran and you. I feel so sad, so lonely. You can go directly after, if you wish."

Michel yielded and Madame Fauvel certainly could not imagine the extent of the sacrifice he was making in remaining longer at Castelflore where everything rendered, if possible, more tangible, Suzanne's absence, and his own disappointment and fears.

When he learned the financial disaster in which the

greater portion of his fortune was sunk, his first thought had been of Miss Severn, and he had left Paris almost immediately. A terrible anguish was gnawing his heart. It would have been so comforting, so sweet to find her there, to hear a cheering tender word in her voice, one of those words which women invent for those who suffer, when they love them; to have on his brow a caress from her lips or her hand; to feel her his own, to intoxicate himself a moment with the assurance that he would be strong to struggle, because he would not be alone.

It was much to expect, much to ask — too much perhaps — Michel knew it. While the train was rolling toward Rivailler, his poor brain had wearied itself in going over the selfsame facts and conjectures which had haunted it for two days.

Suzanne was young; she loved luxury, the ample, easy existence which fortune bestows. It would be necessary first to reassure her. Trémor had promised himself to be tender, to let his heart speak for the first time. He was intoxicated with the hope that he might induce the young girl to face the prospect of a more quiet life. He had remembered the brow, the eyes so artlessly lifted to his lips in the hour of parting; he fancied he again heard the timid voice which had stammered:

"Don't bid me good-bye unkindly."

The next instant he had roused himself from this reverie. He had thought that his arguments would doubtless remain vain, and his tenderness powerless, in the presence of Suzanne's regrets, and then he would

be compelled to say: "I am no longer the rich man to whom you were engaged. Since you do not love me, you are free."

She had gone, voluntarily, mysteriously; she had gone without saying anything. There were instants when Michel fancied he was in some fevered dream. Then he was obliged to repeat to himself:

"It is you, you who are suffering. Weep, cry out; it is you who are unhappy. Yesterday you were reckoned among the privileged persons in the world. The woman you love was your fiancée; you could offer her the luxurious life that suits you both; you dreamed of being loved as much as you yourself love. And to-day, everything is crumbling around you. This fiancée, the exquisite child you worship, has gone; she deserts you."

Then he reproached himself for his doubts. Suzanne was ignorant of everything. She had gone because — because — He did not know, ideas mingled, whirled through his brain.

When, with his friend, he reached the gate of the little park, nine o'clock had just struck from the church of Rivailler. Daran, reading an entreaty in Michel's eyes, once more crossed the threshold of the tower of Saint-Sylvère and both went to the study, where the White Lady smiled amid the verdure of the tapestry, where the spinning-wheel awaited a woman's hand to make it hum while the worms were gnawing their dark pathway through the ancient furniture.

From Castelflore to the tower of Saint-Sylvère Michel had scarcely uttered a dozen words; now he sat down, exhausted, very pale, and still silent. At first

Albert had avoided disturbing the thoughts behind the brow whose lines of grief he divined in the dusk, but this persistent dumbness began to alarm him."

"My poor dear fellow," he said suddenly, "you are inventing more troubles than you have; you are torturing yourself before you even know anything positively."

And as Michel did not seem to have heard him, he suddenly clasped both his hands with affectionate abruptness, adding:

"Come, be frank with me; what is it you believe; what is it that you actually fear? Tell me all."

"I believe that —"

Trémor stopped then, in a low tone:

"I am a wretch, I am enraged with myself for it, but I cannot drive from my mind this abominable thing: it is that Suzanne has heard of my ruin, that she did not feel courage to share with me a hard, or ordinary life, and fearing my grief and Colette's reproaches when she confessed all, she has gone away, with the intention of avoiding a painful explanation by writing. My poor little Suzanne! You see that I am unworthy of her, since I can think that, and believe it to the degree of being as miserable as I am."

"I really do not understand by what right you conjure up such suppositions," said Daran. "Miss Severn, you admit, could only be very imperfectly informed concerning the disposal of your fortune; that is the first point. Here is the second: from what Madame Fauvel has told us, there are excellent reasons why this poor child should have been ignorant, like your sister, of the crash of the Metropolitan Bank, and finally —"

"But do you think that story of Mademoiselle Gémier plausible; come, do you think it natural that Suzanne should run off in an hour, without waiting for Colette, without writing a word?"

"I don't think it is natural, but that is no reason that it may not be true and easy to explain. Then, admitting that Miss Severn did not go in reply to a letter from Mademoiselle Gémier, nothing proves that she went to avoid seeing you."

"Why did she go, then, why? What do you suppose? Speak —"

"I don't suppose — I confess that I don't know any more than you do why she thought fit to absent herself. Only I have often noticed that things we consider incomprehensible almost always end by explaining themselves. I have also noticed that there are many strange misunderstandings — especially between people who love each other."

"Suzanne does not love me."

"How do you know? Have you ever asked her?"

"I know that she does not love me."

"And she, does she know that you love her?"

Michel shook his head, smiling sadly:

"I have never told her so; just think of it."

"That is no reason."

"Ah! you don't know me," cried the young man bitterly. "What have I done to be loved by her? I have been sullen, unkind, cruel; I have disturbed, poisoned all her pleasures; I have been cold, stern —"

"Yes, all this does not prove much," replied Albert philosophically. "But, however that may be, believe

me, it is wrong to be in such haste to accuse a young girl who is your fiancée, to judge her disloyal —"

"I do not think her disloyal," Michel corrected, very gloomily; "no, I do not feel that I have any right to reproach her for her desertion. When we were engaged, she was extraordinarily frank. She was not a woman to marry the first person who was introduced to her, but she had a horror of poverty; she intended to wed only a man who was relatively rich — and she told me without periphrases. I am no longer rich."

"You are not poor. You have your house in the Rue des Belles-Feuilles, about thirty thousand francs in stocks of the Colonizer, the tower of Saint-Sylvère, and a tolerably large property in pictures and works of art. It will be strange if, even without reckoning what the liquidation of the Parisian bank will produce, all this will not give you at least twelve or fifteen thousand francs income. You will make on an average half as much again by your work — yes, yes. And if, between now and then, you need a sum, even a large sum, you know very well that —"

The worthy Daran stopped, too much agitated to continue; then he held out his hand to Michel, saying in a lower tone:

"You knew very well that you would find it, eh?"

Michel pressed the faithful hand.

"Yes, my friend," he said; "I do know; I have never doubted it."

He was silent, then went on more calmly:

"When first hearing of the crash of the Metropolitan Bank, I was overwhelmed, but now — ah! I assure you

that I would feel capable of regaining courage, even of being happy, if — if she loved me."

"Do you remember," replied Daran, "that one day I laughingly told you the happiness I wished you: fifty thousand pounds less income, and the love of a woman who was worthy of you — into the bargain. I did not suppose, alas! that I was speaking as a prophet, but why should I not have been one halfway? Afterward we talked for a very long time about Miss Severn."

"Oh! I remember.— The fiancée whom a combination of events imposed upon me was indifferent to me. I don't know how, but everything has changed. I believe that at first I loved her because she is kind — so delicately, so humanely kind that I was ashamed of my dull selfishness to so much suffering; then I loved her because her fresh beauty, her young, artless grace, have conquered, charmed me. I loved her because — I do not know. I loved her so much that I loved even her coquettish airs and the childishness that irritated me, her absurd little accent which nothing will correct, her pronunciation of certain words which she persists in, as if doing it on purpose —"

In the suffering of this hour, Michel let his secret escape. Before Daran could answer, he continued:

"I ought to have told her that I loved her — I have not done so. In the first place, I scarcely admitted it to myself; it was only when I believed I was losing her, that I really understood — then you know, I am diffident, and it seemed as if I was so far from being a man to please her. I was afraid. So long as I had not spoken to her, I could believe that she loved me, or would

love me; I could hope. And if she had laughed! No, I had not the courage to tell her what I was feeling; one cruel word would have tortured me. I kept silence, and I was jealous, unkind; I took pleasure in vexing her, while torturing myself. Then when her eyes filled with tears when, in short, she suffered, wounded in her woman's pride, I suffered still more. I felt a mad longing to clasp her in my arms and beg her forgiveness, but I dared not, and the mischief was done; I was wretched enough to kill myself, and I —"

Emotion choked him; he was silent, burying his forehead in his hands.

"And do you believe," said Daran, "that you could have loved thus, suffered thus, without having this poor child whom you slander see anything, understand anything? Do you suppose that there has never been anything in your eyes, your voice; yes, even in the midst of your anger, which did not cry out your love and your suffering? Come, come! And, as for supposing that Miss Severn made the calculation of which you speak —"

"She did not love me."

"She did not love you when you were engaged, of course! Neither did you love her. Besides, that is not the best of my reasons. I know Miss Severn very slightly; I have talked with her only two or three times. . . . Well, what do you want me to tell you? It was sufficient for me to see her fifteen minutes, to meet her beautiful, frank eyes, to be certain to-day that, if she had wished to break her engagement with you, she would have told you so face to face, openly, as she told you that she was marrying you without loving you.

If I were you, I should return to Paris to-morrow. I should go to Mademoiselle Gémier's house, and I should tell my fiancée all, first my love, then —"

"No," interrupted Michel. "It is a question of pride with me. If I listened to my heart, it would not be long, ah! Heaven, no! But you heard what I said to Colette. I wish Suzanne to feel free. If she has known nothing about the Metropolitan Bank, if the story Colette told me is true, Suzanne will write without delay, as she promised. If, on arriving at Paris she has learned all, she will also write. Perhaps she will write to me; then be sure that I shall soon be with her. And, besides, even if she learns nothing, who knows? I shall possibly find a line at my home in Paris, where she thinks I am."

Michel grew excited while speaking; his face brightened.

"She will certainly have written to me — that I might come to see her — or to Robert. Why didn't I think of that? You are right, I always look at things in the worst light. It would be so simple, so natural to expect — and yet I cannot, my friend, I cannot —"

"At least write to her."

"It is her place to write."

"And if she has not written?" Daran cut in almost brutally.

Michel started.

"Why do you say that? Why shouldn't she write?"

"How do I know? For the reason that neither you nor I know the cause of this strange departure? What shall you do, if she doesn't write?"

"I shall wait two days, three days at most, then I will

write to her myself; I will tell her that I am a ruined man, and that I will give her back her promise — that is what I shall do. But I will take no step beforehand; I have irrevocably decided upon that, and no one could shake my resolution."

Michel now spoke in a tone so firm that Daran did not insist. With a slight shrug of the shoulders, he rose and held out his hand to his friend.

"Good night, old man," he said; "you must have a little rest and quiet now; I'll meet you at the seven o'clock train to-morrow."

As soon as he returned home, Albert Daran took up a notebook and wrote an address in it. Mademoiselle Gémier, 35 Rue des Saints-Pères.

VII

SUZANNE had not written. Like Michel, she was waiting.

The second day after her departure from Castelflore, always dominated by the same idea, telling herself that all was ended, she was in despair over the indifference of her future husband, even before being certain that Michel knew of her escapade.

After luncheon she had taken refuge in Mademoiselle Gémier's drawing-room and was trying to sew, when Albert Daran was announced. Then wild terror made her spring from her seat; in an instant all the accidents, all the diseases, all the more or less probable events which might have befallen Michel, whom she had left perfectly well a few days before, darted through her brain and with a bound, rushing to meet the entering visitor, she could utter only one word: "Michel?"

"Michel is well," replied Daran quickly, "and, like him, all those you love."

"Does Michel send you?" the young girl questioned again.

"No, Mademoiselle; I have ventured to come myself. Will you pardon the liberty I have taken in doing so?"

Very pale, with one hand unconsciously clenched upon her throbbing breast, Miss Severn motioned Michel's friend to a seat.

"It is my place to ask pardon, Monsieur Daran," she said, "for I am receiving you in a very strange

way. But I feel so alone, so deserted! For two days —"

It was not yet two days, but the time had seemed to her very long.

"For two days, I have had nothing from any one, no one has remembered me."

This general term of no one might be translated by a single name: Michel.

"But, Mademoiselle," replied Daran, very respectfully, "did not you state, when you left — a little abruptly — that you would write? At least that is what Madame Fauvel told Michel, whom I accompanied to Castelflore."

"To Castelflore?"

"To Castelflore, the evening of the day before yesterday, Mademoiselle. Besides, have you written?"

"No," answered Miss Severn, in a curt tone; "no, I have not written."

And the idea entered her head: why had not chance, why had not Providence permitted her to meet Michel before she had put her unfortunate project into execution? But no; the trains had passed each other at some intermediate station.

Daran made no answer. The young girl hesitated only a moment.

"I did not write," she said, "because I did not want to write. Oh! I know, I have often boasted of being a reasonable person — but the most reasonable often have their hours of unreason. I imagined all sorts of things. I was in trouble — I —"

She stopped, her lips quivered; she seemed on the

verge of weeping. Daran could only question her with his eyes. In spite of his good intentions he did not feel that he had any right to interrogate more explicitly.

"Mademoiselle Gémier did not write to me; Mademoiselle Gémier did not summon me," she went on with feverish vivacity. "If I left Castelflore, it was because Claude Béthune said — oh! only to tease me, in jest, not knowing the harm he was doing, that absurd story of our engagement which had been concealed from me — yes, that is why I went away — and then, too, on account of that horrible woman —"

"What horrible woman?" asked Daran bewildered.

"That comtesse, you know very well, come — that horrible Comtesse Wronska!"

"Comtesse Wronska?" repeated Daran, who understood less and less. "Why, Michel has not seen her for years."

"Years! Ah! you are well informed; I congratulate you," cried Miss Severn hotly. "He saw her at Trouville this spring, and then he spent all Sunday with her at Barbizon. She wrote to Michel, she — oh! I should like to kill her!"

"Come, Mademoiselle," replied Daran, summoning all his eloquence and all his judgment, "it seems to me that — that in your emotion, you are entangling matters a little. Suppose we should try to classify them? I have lived longer than you, and I have often had occasion to prove that the majority of quarrels come from what people have neglected to explain clearly. Yes, I assure you, one perceives ninety times out of a hundred that a mere nothing, a word, would have been enough to comprehend;

it is always this one word which has not been spoken."

Miss Severn shook her head with an air of doubt and discouragement.

"Do not be angry with me," continued Daran; "I am the oldest, and I might almost dare to affirm, the most devoted of Michel's friends; by this title I feel, very respectfully, your friend also. That is why I believe I have the right to speak to you with this frankness."

"I am not at all angry with you," murmured the young girl.

"Thank you. This being agreed, I am going to prove at once how deceptive appearances often are. You tell me that Comtesse Wronska was at Barbizon, and that your betrothed husband had spent Sunday with her. I did not know, I confess, that Comtesse Wronska had written to Michel, but what I do know perfectly is that Michel did not go to Barbizon Sunday. He wrote to say that he was detained at Rivailler. And I have the better reason to state this because my valet carried the letter to the station, and Trémor spent all day Sunday, the entire day — I think he dined at Castelflore — at my house. Upon this fact, at least, I give you my word as an honest man."

"Oh! dear Monsieur Daran!"

She had clasped her hands, her face was radiant.

"You see, Mademoiselle," concluded the inventor of the Elixir des Muscogulges, smiling, "that there might perhaps be a little exaggeration in killing Comtesse Wronska."

"And Claude's story," said Suzanne. "You must know it, since Michel has no secrets from you."

Daran assented.

"That is why I came. Oh! to think that that ridiculous joke was the cause of our engagement; to think that, in consequence of a jest, Michel believed himself forced to marry me; to think, above all, that it was I who thrust myself upon him, who wrote to say that I would consent to be his wife — when he had no desire to marry me; to think that he — that he did not love me, that perhaps he did not even like me, who knows? Oh, it is terrible, unbearable. Day before yesterday, when I discovered it all, I wanted to die."

"It is very fortunate that so imprudent a wish did not fall into the ears of some wicked fairy, Mademoiselle," remarked Daran. "The somewhat singular circumstances which accompanied — let us say even caused Michel's engagement — are known to me. I should speak falsely were I to tell you that Trémor was delighted with Claude's April Fool trick. No, at first, this imprudent young fellow's conduct very justly exasperated him. He had even positively decided to inform you, through Madame Béthune, that he did not intend to marry."

"But then?"

"At least it was with this intention that he set out one morning for Précroix. What took place then between you and him, Mademoiselle, I do not know. But at that time, Michel was already very weary of his wandering life, very weary of solitude. Even admitting that the circumstances may have stimulated a somewhat timid will, believe that it was by his own free wish that Michel ratified the offer of that little rascal, Claude. And, be-

sides, Mademoiselle, what do things in the past matter, since Michel who, at that time, felt only an affectionate sympathy for the little cousin whom he had scarcely seen, now loves sincerely, ardently, with all his heart, the fiancée whom he knows, whom he admires, to whom he has given his life? "

"Has he ever told you so?" cried Suzanne, as Trémor had done the evening before.

"Yes, Mademoiselle," Daran assented; "he has told me so in the tower of Saint-Sylvère, while giving himself up, like you, to the most improbable and the most unjust conjectures; he told me so while torturing his heart, while longing to rush to you, and denying himself this joy; he told me so with a multitude of mad words. He simply worships you, and the only thing that surprises me is that you have not divined this adoration."

Suzanne had flushed deeply. The happy light again appeared in her eyes, but without yet illumining her face.

"Oh!" she murmured, "there are days when we think we divine, and then others —"

Even at this hour, she did not dare to be wholly convinced.

"If he loves me," she continued, trying to look severe, "why didn't he come, cost what it might; why, having no letter from me, did he not at least write to me, why, why?"

"Why, Mademoiselle," replied Daran, more gravely. "Perhaps it is not my place to tell you; yet you must know. Because the Metropolitan Bank has just failed, because Michel finds himself, in a day, ruined, ruined to

the point of being compelled to seek in the provinces some poor little position as an archivist or librarian and, under these conditions, he wishes to restore your freedom — that is why."

VIII

FIVE o'clock was about striking. Three times during the day, Michel had managed to return home, always hoping to find a letter from Suzanne, or a telegram from Colette. On that day, detesting deception, he had been obliged to inform his brother-in-law of Miss Severn's presence at Mademoiselle Gémier's. Robert had instantly expressed his intention of going to the boarding-house in the Rue des Saints-Pères, at the first moment of leisure, but he was very busy, and as Michel had avoided giving the facts to Monsieur Fauvel, the latter had not paid much attention to the incident.

After having confessed his real feelings to Daran, Michel experienced a sort of shame for this openness. He lunched with his friend and saw him two or three times without alluding to the conversation of the evening before. Daran respected this reserve. He cherished no illusions concerning the efficacy of the efforts made to shake Michel's determination. But though Trémor might conceal his suffering, Albert well knew that in the midst of the most serious business, the young man still felt in the depths of his heart the little bleeding wound, while through his fevered brain constantly passed the temptation of those few words: "35 Rue des Saints-Pères."

And the clairvoyant friend was not mistaken. More than once, since his arrival in Paris, Michel had been on the point of going to ask Suzanne for the ex-

planation he desired, while dreading. Yet he had resisted.

Neither letter, nor despatch. How the hours dragged along!

The anguish was becoming unbearable. The next day he would write or go to the Rue des Saints-Pères.

After a fatiguing day he had returned, feeling very lonely and greatly depressed, to the apartment where so many things subtly reminded him of the comforts and delicate pleasures of his past life, yet experiencing a great need of solitude and rest.

The servant had gone out; no step, no sound distracted Michel's thoughts. At the utmost a carriage occasionally passed along the street below.

Trémor had sunk down upon the sofa in the smoking-room, where a few months before he had talked so long with Daran, and he remained there, without moving, his cigarette out, lost in a sort of reverie.

It seemed as if he had absorbed some anæsthetic powerful enough to paralyse the motions of his limbs, too weak to affect his thoughts.

He heard the little bell at the door, but so vaguely, that the practical idea of going to open it did not cross his mind. It rang a second time, more loudly; then the young man remembered that he had told Daran the hour when he expected to return home, and he rose quickly.

At first Michel saw in the frame of the open doorway only a woman dressed in dark clothing, then it seemed as if a brilliant light suddenly illumined his visitor. He recognised Suzanne, and a singular mental phenomenon took place. While a flood of joy filled his heart, the

dim suspicion of a caprice, an intentional cruelty arose. Even at the moment when, perhaps madly, he almost believed that his sufferings had been needless, he recalled them more fully and, with his complex feelings, came a sort of fierce resentment, strange and passionate wrath against the fragile creature who thus appeared before him. He did not ask himself whether Suzanne had heard of the disaster to the Metropolitan Bank, or if he still had to tell her. He did not remember, he realised one thing only — that in two days he had seemed to live through a whole existence, yet she was there, brought by a vision of the imagination, ready to smile, no doubt, perhaps waiting for the forgiveness to be implored which she herself should have sought, or rather not suspecting the torture she had caused for mere amusement.

"It is I," said Miss Severn, in a voice she endeavoured to render calm and even brave, though at the sight of Michel when the door opened, she had started.

Trémor silently showed her into the smoking-room, then closed the door.

"Will you at last have the kindness," he said, "to inform me what has taken place within these two days? Not only did you leave Castelflore like a fugitive, but you did not consider it necessary to write a word to Colette or to me, you —"

Tears rushed to Suzanne's eyes, and she made an instinctive gesture to ask for mercy.

"I went away because Claude had told me — because I thought that — horrible things! and then — Daran came, he told me that you were ruined, that you were

going to be a poor archivist in some province, that you no longer wished to marry me —"

Michel listened with haggard features and white lips, not daring to speak, not daring to guess what Suzanne was going to say, his whole being concentrated in the gaze bent upon the agitated face of the young girl.

For an almost imperceptible instant Miss Severn stopped, then clasping her hands and half weeping, she implored:

"Oh, Michel, I will work if it is necessary. I entreat you, marry me all the same, I — "

But already, with a stifled cry, Michel had seized her, prisoned her in his arms, and for a long moment thus pressed her to his heart, finding no words to express the triumphant joy he felt, losing all idea of time, of the things surrounding him, not even seeing his love, only conscious of her sweet presence, the perfume of her hair, the warmth of her brow, the emotion of her poor little heart.

When he spoke, it was as if in a dream, very low, with an absurd fear of waking vanished sorrows.

"You wished to marry only a rich man?"

"I did not know —"

"Then you do love me a little?"

"A little," she murmured; "yes, that is it —"

"My little Zanne, my beloved child, my treasure — I worship you!"

Now he looked at her, admired her, wondered to find her wholly changed and yet entirely herself; he kissed her hair, he kissed away her tears, enjoying more sweetly

than in the first moment this happiness of being loved with genuine affection, with a love stronger than events, powerful enough to dominate them, perhaps to transform sorrow into joy, and anxieties to happiness.

Then Suzanne sat down in the very place where he had suffered so much through her a moment ago. Then the dream the little fiancée had often had, and which had penetrated her despair the evening of the day before yesterday, was realised.

As on the morning after the ball at Chesnaie, she saw the stern lord of the tower of Saint-Sylvère kneeling before her. In a low tone, he told the young girl that he loved, worshipped her, that he was happy, that he had long adored her, but had never dared to tell her so. He said that he was still rich enough to give the woman he loved an easy life, yet he added that, even if he had been obliged to become "a poor archivist in some province," he would never have found courage, if she loved him, to give her up. He told her what their future life would be, that he would work a great deal; they would live in modest style in Paris, and perhaps might keep the tower of Saint-Sylvère. And then again that he loved, he worshipped his Susy, his little Zanne, and that he was happy!

She listened, delighted, scarcely answering. She had found the refuge for which she longed. Had there ever been a time when she would have taken a different view of life and happiness? It seemed to her that everything Michel said was beautiful and right, that everything he might desire, everything he might do, would be good and

beautiful. It seemed as if this hour was even sweeter than her dreams had pictured it. She enjoyed its exquisite happiness with a sort of astonishment. It was really Michel who was talking, who was tenderly saying all these things.

At the end of a moment, Suzanne related Claude's revelations, and her grief, her wild resolutions. She wished to justify her reckless flight; perhaps she also desired to hear from Michel's own lips the story which Daran had shortened.

This story was another delicious thing.

"I astonished you very much that day at the Béthunes'. I talked extravagantly; had you ever imagined marrying a young girl like me?"

He smiled.

"No."

"Did you dislike me?" Then, without waiting for an answer: "Oh! Michel, I was ignorant! I did not know how to dissimulate. I had no idea of French customs. Now I have learned. Michel, if you did not dislike me, why were you so disagreeable? Oh! dear, disagreeable to such a degree! How could I ever have been able to care for a man so disagreeable as you?"

"I was so jealous! And you were so coquettish, and so — American, and then — I loved you so much!"

"Oh! that is a fine reason! And now, here is a whole half hour during which you have not scolded me! Yet, I think, I have committed to-day the very worst of my *Americanisms*."

"In France," Miss Severn went on with a comical assumption of seriousness, "a well-brought-up young

girl would never permit herself to come all alone in this way to a bachelor's rooms — even though she was engaged to him! French customs —"

"How well you have done to forget them at this moment, my dear little madcap!"

Susy laughed. "But," she said, "it is only for once — I had not forgotten them at all. On the contrary!"

She flushed crimson, her long lashes drooped and, while glancing through them, she murmured:

"I thought that when I had come so, alone, to a 'bachelor,' you would be obliged to become my husband; that is it."

"Oh! my darling!" was his only reply, touched by the smiling words. Then he added:

"Daran has made me more heroic than I am."

"Ah!" exclaimed Miss Severn, with a little cry of joy; "how I adore that dear Daran!"

"And so do I," agreed Michel.

She looked at him again with her bewitching glance, so full of sparkling light.

"Michel," she said, "it seems to me that the little bit of romance, you know, my grandmother's romance, has grown in my mind till gradually, of late, it has reached my heart."

But it was necessary to talk sensibly. They decided that Suzanne should return to Castelflore that very evening with Monsieur Fauvel. Michel, on account of an appointment with Maître Allinges, must take one of the last trains.

On the threshold of the door, Miss Severn stopped, saying:

"Will you give me a very great pleasure? I should like to make an appointment with you, too."

He smiled, murmuring with a little shade of reproach: "As you did with Paul Réault."

"No," she said, without being disturbed by the remark; "Paul Réault did not come, and I want you to do so. But when I said a meeting, no — it is rather a pilgrimage which we should make together."

Trémor questioned her with his eyes:

"To-morrow, at half past ten, to the Green Sepulchre; will you?"

While the young girl ran down the staircase Michel remained leaning over the railing, following her with his eyes.

He felt a sort of astonishment that an instant could change everything in a life — that it is possible to pass thus, without any twilight, from sorrowful gloom to brilliant, blazing light.

IX

WHILE a wan sunlight was illumining the dew upon the autumn leaves, Michel Trémor left the highway and turned into the path which loiters idly toward the cross-roads of Jouvelles and the Green Sepulchre.

A rough little breeze had ill-treated the wood. Already, like vague skeletons, the boughs could be divined beneath the lighter foliage of the trees. Wings sometimes fluttered, little sharp cries expressed some sudden pain. And the pale, pale sun seemed like a phantom of the day-star.

Michel Trémor thought of a day in March when he had thus followed the road to Jouvelles, believing that it resembled many others, when yonder, in the chapel, near the sleeping knight, his fate awaited him.

The young man was comparing the Michel Trémor of yesterday and the Michel Trémor of to-day. The sight of the things which had passed before his eyes in the spring recalled the thoughts of that time. Faustine Morel, Comtesse Wronska! How those two names had occupied his brain, dragging with them the joys and sufferings of former days.

Michel again saw Faustine's smile, the smile which had rested on the young girl's fresh lips and the cleverly rouged mouth of the woman, the little ironical smile whose secret he had never fathomed.

In this hour of solitude which suddenly brought him face to face with the past, Michel realised with singular

intensity what a distance now separated him from that time which he now scarcely recognised.

The utter indifference of to-day melted into a sort of pity, not only for Faustine, but all the men and women who, in so short a life, suffer so many things. A feeling of melancholy stole over him, blending with his joy, without lessening it. Perhaps this very melancholy might be counted among the moral elements which made of his new love a new feeling, that differed as much from the former one as the man whom he had become differed from the man he had been. It was a deeper love, though pervaded by so glowing a passion.

But, above all, it was Love! And gradually an emotion took possession of Michel's heart and mind, drowning every memory, paralysing every effort of analysis, as the towers and the ivy robe of the Green Sepulchre rose before him and every step brought him nearer the goal of the pilgrimage to which, by a pretty caprice of tenderness, Suzanne had bidden him. What mattered the past, the future, since she was there, loving, at last conquered!

He fancied he already saw her, with her ruffled hair, her rosy cheeks, in the gown she had worn the evening before, a dark silk gown, with light frills about the neck. He saw her joyous smile, heard her coaxing voice, a little childish in certain inflections. She was there, close at hand; she was there.

Trémor entered; he had seen the figure of the knight from the doorway. All was very still, very silent around this stone slumber. And Suzanne?

A light, slender figure darted suddenly from the back

of the chapel, and Trémor at first felt a great and somewhat childish disappointment in seeing — as if he had gone back six months into the past — the little bicyclist in the boyish costume who had appeared to him one spring evening beneath the blue light of a Gothic glass window.

It was not she whom he had expected, no, not she at all. He felt this very keenly, but he tried to struggle against the impression; he even forced a smile — unless it was in answer to another smile which emerged from the shadow with the unlucky sporting costume.

"Ah! here you are at last!"

She had held out both hands and, disarmed, Trémor had clasped them and kissed one after the other.

She was still smiling, her eyes sparkling, very femininely pretty, and Michel gazed at her forgetting everything else.

"Come, Mr. Scientist," she said, taking the young man's hand in her turn; "come and decipher a very ancient and thoroughly historical inscription."

She led Michel to the rear of the chapel, and among the names written on the wall by so many women, mischievously pointed out one which was alone of its kind, at least under this foreign form, a very short name: Susy. The four letters were those the little bicyclist had traced by the light of a lantern, while, with his head full of memories Michel, standing on the threshold of the door, sadly watched the falling rain.

"Michel," asked Miss Severn, repeating, with a little emotion in her laughing voice, the legendary words: "Is there a sweeter name?"

Trémor shook his head.

"No, my darling Susy, not to me," he said tenderly; "no, I know of none sweeter."

Suzanne looked at him with anxious intentness.

"Not even that of Allys?"

"Not even that."

She continued, unconsciously emphasising the words:

"Not even that of — Faustine?"

"Not even that, oh! I swear it!"

"Do you remember," Susy went on more gaily, "that I thought you looked like the knight — I think so still."

"Yes, certainly, I remember."

"And do you remember what the legend you told me said? Only a name sweeter than that of Allys could restore the poor knight's repose. Can he sleep in peace, Michel?"

Michel smiled with a very young expression.

"The legend said something else. And that is why the village girls were afraid to write their names in the chapel. It said that being very much in love with her who had saved him, the knight would not permit that she should have any other husband than he — You are right, my beloved Zanne, the knight and I do resemble each other a little."

"You resemble each other a great deal, so far as jealousy is concerned. Confess!"

But she did not give Michel time to confess.

"What did you say in your letter to that wicked comtesse?" she cried, seized with suspicion.

Trémor could not help laughing at the connection.

"I told her that my fiancée had just been very ill,

that for a moment I feared losing her, and that I was still too anxious to leave her, even for a day."

"Oh! Michel, that was not perfectly true, but how nice of you to say so! I detest that woman!"

"Oh! why?"

"Because. She has not written to you again?"

"No."

"You will never see her again?"

"Never, very probably. But I could, I assure you."

"You don't love her at all, not at all?"

"It is a very long time, Susy, since I have loved her."

"Is that true?"

"Why, yes, it is true."

"Perfectly true?"

"Perfectly."

Miss Severn reflected an instant, then gently laying her hands on Michel's shoulders, she looked up at him, her eyes full of smiles.

"No matter," she said, "I would rather, I would much rather you should not see her again."

Michel regained possession of the two little hands and gazed silently at the pretty, coquettish face with its downcast lashes.

"Susy," he murmured, deciding to speak, "why did you put on this hideous costume which I dislike?"

She turned her head toward the door with a nod, and said drolly:

"I have my fancies."

But the explanation did not seem sufficient, for Michel continued in the same tone of gentle reproach:

"When I see you thus disguised, I no longer find my pretty fiancée; you look like a naughty little boy."

"The past must be reconstituted," she said, with the same comical expression, "and then —"

She paused and in a lower tone, with sudden emotion, continued:

"Michel, I am not perfect, I have many faults. Perhaps, who knows? I wanted to remind you of them to-day? This ugly little boy who has often shocked you is not dead in me. From time to time, alas! he will reappear, oh! that is certain, even when we are married. He will weary you; he will vex you again and — I want you to love him, Michel, though he displeases you, as you love the Susy who pleases you. Oh! dearest, I want, I want you to love him."

She spoke sweetly, timidly, in a delicate fear, a pretty humility, expressing as best she could that ardent desire, that necessity for exclusive love, tender indulgence, which she had in her heart. Michel was deeply touched. Speaking also in a very low tone, as if the secret must belong to Suzanne alone, he said the words she expected:

"Well, I will love him; I do love him — I love you only; I love all that is in you, all that is you."

And he added smiling, a little embarrassed:

"I, too, have faults, and far more than you, perhaps. Have you forgotten how often I have been unjust, cruel — even to you, whom I worshipped? Let us love each other fully, my own dear love; let us love each other such as we are."

And never, as at that hour, had he felt that he loved Suzanne "such as she was," such as nature, environment,

education had made her, that he loved in her, not an ideal, but her entire self; that he loved her, in short, with that exclusive and clairvoyant love of which six months before, on the strand of Trouville, with her enigmatic smile upon her lips, Comtesse Wronska had spoken.

Gradually the wan sun had brightened. It was shining with a more golden radiance upon the grass and the leaves which framed the door; it flamed with the yellows and blues of the ancient glass; it lay with a warm caress upon the brow of the knight. And it seemed as if the grave stone countenance was beaming with a gentle joy, as if really, on this autumn morning something mysterious had brought him peace. Michel felt as if this beautiful smiling sun had penetrated his own heart. It suddenly seemed to him that he regretted nothing of the past, not even perhaps the fortune whose loss had at first affected him so painfully.

The brilliant rays reminded him of another morning when, with all the windows open to the April light, he had tried to classify,— to follow Daran's advice,— the documents which constituted the foundation of his future History of the Hétheens. He saw again the scattered sheets, the notes, the piles of sketches; he recalled his fumbling, his uncertainties, his indolent hesitations of that time. No, he regretted no portion of the past. Now new energies awoke in him. He would labour. He would try to realise his dreams. He would no longer work as a dilettante, in idleness; he would toil valiantly, sanely, giving all his efforts, all his capacity, like a man.

With her head leaning on her lover's breast, Suzanne looked at him from time to time, but without speaking.

"Michel," she murmured at last, unconsciously answering the thought within her companion's mind, "is not God good and life beautiful? We shall be very happy."

"Yes, very happy," he assented.

Then he bent to the face smiling up at him; in the ancient chapel by the soft blue light which had sheltered their first interview, they exchanged the kiss of their real betrothal.

And the grave knight of the tower of Saint-Sylvère was thinking the same thoughts as the little April fiancée; he was thinking that God is good; he was thinking also that life is beautiful, when a great work is its duty, and a great love is its joy.

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